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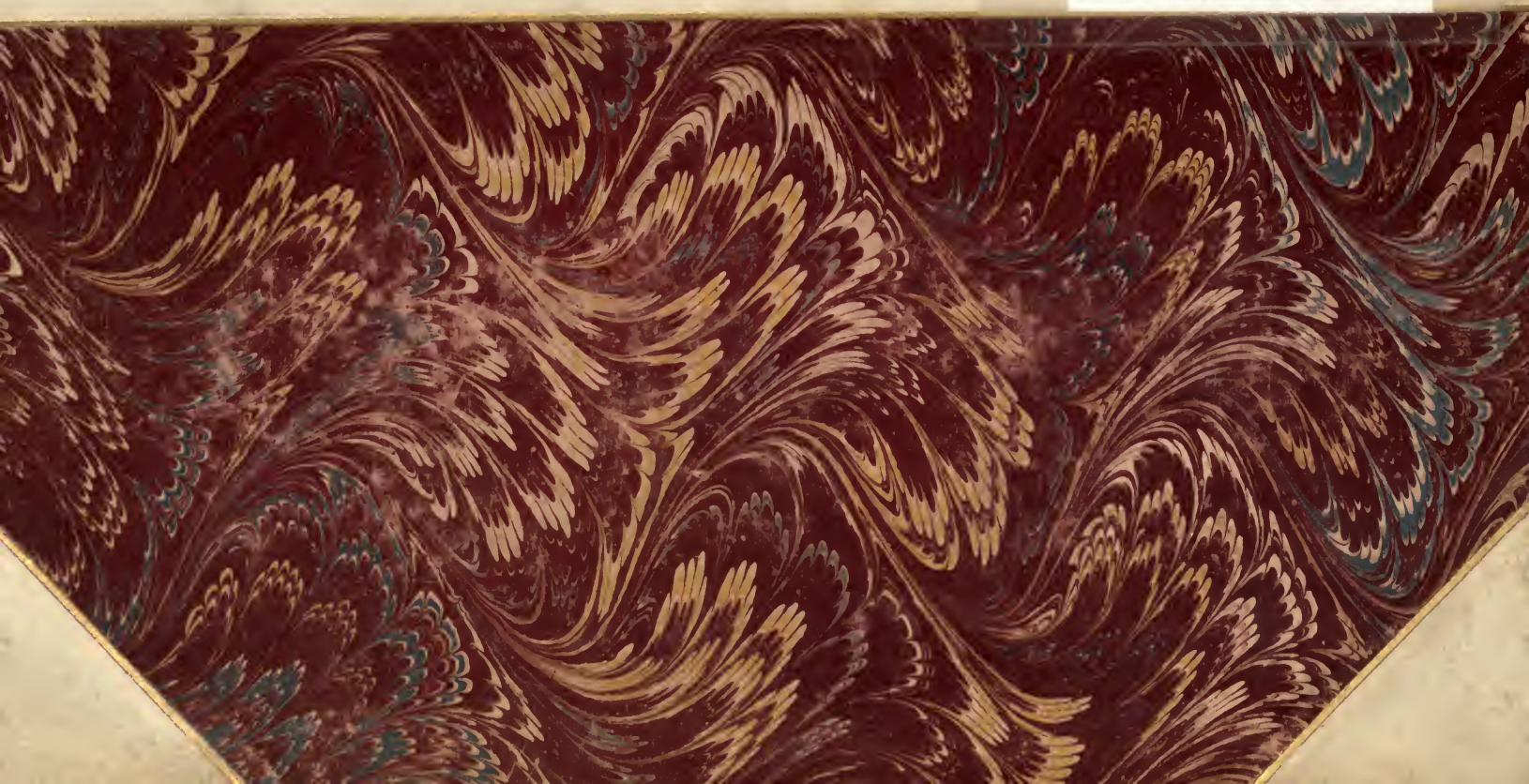

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SERMONS.

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SERMONS.

BY

HENRY EDWARD MANNING, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF CHICHESTER.

VOLUME THIRD.

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TO

BENJAMIN HARRISON, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF MAIDSTONE,

AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE,

SLIGHT AND UNWORTHY,

FOR THE UNWEARIED OFFICES

OF

A KIND AND PATIENT FRIENDSHIP

THROUGH MANY YEARS,

This Volume

IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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SERMON I.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

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"I am the Good Shepherd."

Of all the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, there are none more deeply engraven in the mind of the Church, none more dear to her than these. This is one of those divine sayings in which there is so much of truth and love, that we seem able to do little more than to record it and ponder on it, to express it by symbols, and to draw from it a multitude of peaceful and heavenly thoughts. It is full of figures and analogies of loving-kindness. It is almost sacramental in its depth and power. To expound or comment upon it, or further to illustrate its meaning, seems impossible. The Truth has said of Himself, "I am the Good Shepherd." All love, care, providence, devotion, watchfulness, that is in earth or in hea-

ven, in the ministry of men or of angels, is but a reflection and participation of that which is in Him. Surely nothing but the vision of His Presence in glory can exceed this revelation of Himself.

These words have taken so deep a hold of the hearts of His people, that, from the beginning, they passed into a common title for their exalted Head. It was the symbol under which, in times of persecution, His Presence was shadowed forth. It was sculptured on the walls of sepulchres and catacombs; it was painted in upper chambers and in oratories; it was traced upon their sacred books; it was graven on the vessels of the altar. The image of the Good Shepherd has expressed, as in a parable, all their deepest affections, fondest musings, most docile obedience, most devoted trust. It is a Title in which all other titles meet, in the light of which they blend and lose themselves. Priest, Prophet, King, Saviour, and Guide, are all summed up in this one more than royal, paternal, saving name. It recalls in one word all the mercies and lovnig-kindness of God to His people of old, when "the Shepherd of Israel" made His own people "to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock."[1] It recites, as it were, all the prophecies and types of the Divine

[1] Ps. lxxviii. 52.

care which were then yet to be revealed to His elect: it revives the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel; "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."[1] "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord

[1] Isaiah xl. 11.

will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke." "And David My servant shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd." "They shall feed in the ways, and their pasture shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them."[1]

And, moreover, by this Title He appropriates to Himself the fulfilment of His own most deep and touching parable of the lost sheep. There is no thought or emotion of pity, compassion, gentleness, patience, and love, which is not here expressed. It is the peculiar consolation of the weak, or of them that are out of the way; of the lost and wandering;

[1] Ezek. xxxiv. 12-27; xxxvii. 24; Isaiah xlix. 9, 10.

of the whole flock of God here scattered abroad "in the midst of this naughty world." And though it be an Office taken on earth, and in the time of our infirmity, it is a Name which He will never lay aside. Even in the heavenly glory it still is among His Titles. He is even there "the chief Shepherd," "that great Shepherd of the sheep;" and in the state of bliss shall still guide His flock: though more fully to express the unity of His nature with theirs, and His own spotless sacrifice in their behalf, He is called the Lamb. "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters,"[1] where they shall be filled with brightness.

In this, then, we see the character and office of our blessed Master towards His Church, and the relation in which, though now ascended into heaven, He still stands to us. It expresses generally His pastoral relation of care and love for the universal flock of the elect: but especially the greatness of that love and care.

Let us, then, consider awhile the surpassing and peculiar goodness of the One True Shepherd.

And this He has revealed to the world in His voluntary death. There was never any other but He who came down from heaven that He might lay down "His life for the sheep." He

[1] Rev. vii. 17.

is the true David, who said, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him."[1] When out of the countless flock of creatures, one, and that the weakest, was caught away from the true fold of God, He came down "to seek and to save that which was lost;" to seek it even unto death, and in death itself; and to follow the lost along "the valley of the shadow of death," gathering the scattered and outcast of His Father's flock, and fulfilling His word: "I will surely assemble thee, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold." By death He destroyed him that had the power of death; and by His resurrection He made a way for the ransomed to pass through. "The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them."[2] "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help. I will be thy King: where is any other that may save

[1] 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35. [2] Micah ii. 12, 13.

thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."[1] "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep."[2] This is the one perpetual token of His great love to all mankind,—a token ever fresh, quickened with life, full of power to persuade and subdue the hearts of His people to Himself. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends:"[3] and therefore the Death of the Good Shepherd is the subject of all the Church's testimony. The holy Eucharist is a type of her whole office to "shew forth the Lord's death till He come." It is the great mystery of love, the mighty power of conversion, the true

[1] Hosea xiii. 9, 10, 14. [2] St. John x. 11-15.

[3] St. John xv. 13.

and very life of our love to Him, the pledge that He loved us before we were; and that He loves us still, even after our fall. "While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us;" "that He might gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." "We love Him, because He first loved us."

Again, His surpassing goodness is shewn in the provision He has made of all things necessary for the salvation of His flock in this state of mortality and sin. There can no soul fail of eternal life, of reaching the rest of the true fold in Heaven, except by his own free will. As the blood-shedding of the Good Shepherd is a full and perfect ransom for all His flock, so has He pledged the perpetual exercise of His unseen pastoral care to give us all that is needed for our salvation.

1. And for this He has provided, first of all, in the external foundation and visible perpetuity of His Church. He has secured it by the commission to baptize all nations, by the universal preaching of His Apostles, by shedding abroad the Holy Ghost, by the revelation of all truth, by the universal tradition of the faith in all the world. For the perpetuity of the Church He has pledged His Divine word, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;" and in this He has pro-

vided for the perpetuity both of truth and grace. For what is the perpetuity of the Church but the perpetuity of the society of them that are "sanctified through the truth?" And how shall this be, unless the means of sanctification, the Faith and the holy Sacraments, are likewise perpetual? The universal promulgation of the truth, and the universal delivery of the holy Sacraments to the Church planted in all lands, is a supernatural fact—a miracle sustained by Divine power, wrought once for all, and containing the surest provisions of perpetuity, through the presence of Christ by the Spirit. Therefore, as the Church is indefectible, though particular members of it may fail of life eternal, so it can never lose the truth, though particular branches of it may err. In like manner of the holy Sacraments and mysteries of grace. Our Lord said to His Apostles, and through them to us, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The commission, authority, succession, and power of the Apostles, is included in that presence, and upheld by it. Howsoever it may be forfeited by any branches of the visible Church, yet it will always be perpetuated with the gift of increase and multiplication, until the day of Christ's coming. And in that apostolic commission are contained all the acts and sacraments by which the grace of Christ is bestowed upon mankind, from the first engraft-

ing of souls into His body, to the last strengthening food which is given to the passing saint. It is in the tenderness of His pastoral care that He has ordained the priesthood of His Church. He who gave His life for all, "would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"[1] How shall they? It is the voice not more of the Gospel than of the pure reason, that the perpetuity of faith upon earth is bound up with the perpetuity of the apostolic commission; nay, further, that the evangelical ministry is the means to the perfection of the saints. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints"—and more, the perfection of the true city of God depends, by Divine will, on the organization and unity of the apostolic body which was ordained—"for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." And fur-

[1] Rom. x. 13, 14.

ther still, in the perpetuity of this same ministry is also contained the perpetuity and unity of the faith itself; "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,"—as all human schools and teachers ever have been and ever shall be—"by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." And lastly, in the same stedfast succession of the Church, both Pastors and Flock, is the virtual perfection of the whole mystical body of Christ: "but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."[1]

How thankless and disloyal are we, then, to the Good Shepherd, if we use the great and blessed truths of the Unity of His Fold, and the succession of His pastors, as antagonistic and controversial dogmas. What can be more meagre and melancholy than to contend for them as externals and forms, and theories of Church-government? Surely, there are no truths more strictly and simply practical than these—none more full of direct benedictions to the

[1] Ephes. iv. 11-16.

faithful—more vivid, real, and sustaining. For what is the unity of His fold, but the everliving token of the presence and love of the heavenly Shepherd, gathering in one the world-wide flock under His own pastoral staff? Is it not a living and life-giving sign of His perpetual indwelling? Is it a mere pale which encompasses His true fold? a hollow external form, remote from the life of the Church? Is it not the one Body of the one Spirit—the living organization of the life-giving unity of Christ? What then do controversies and bickerings about the nature of His Church, and divisions for the sake of its unity, prove, but that we have not attained to so much as a perception of the spiritual reality that quickens the one Fold under one Shepherd? It may seem to be empty and lifeless to the wise of this world; but it is full of tenderness for the poor and lost. It is specially for them that He has called His servants to a fellowship in His pastoral care. "Thus saith the Lord my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter"—that is, the elect, despised, neglected, slain—"whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the Lord; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not." "I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock;"[1] that is, I will

[1] Zech. xi. 4, 5, 7.

send and seek you; I will find you, O wandering sheep—the young, the ignorant, the helpless; "the poor" shall "have the Gospel preached to them."

If there be one institution of Jesus Christ, in which the love, tenderness, care, and providence of the Good Shepherd be revealed, it is in the commission and perpetual succession of His pastors: for, in one word, it is this,—that from the time of His going away to the time of His coming again, there shall never be wanting, in the darkest day, a chosen brotherhood, bound by all the vows which can constrain the hearts of men to live a life of pity and compassion, humility and gentleness, toil and love; and that not for themselves, nor for their own kindred, nor for their own blood; but for "the poor of the flock"—for the ignorant, wandering, weary, soiled, outcast, perishing sheep of Christ. If the goodness of the heavenly Pastor be not here, let any one shew where it may be found. If there be any persuasion, any faith, which is full of warmth, life, energy, consolation, love, to all the faithful, but above all to the ignorant, helpless, afflicted, and poor, it is that of the One Holy Catholic Church, as we confess it in our Baptismal creed, the one true Fold of the one Good Shepherd. It is He that still visibly discharges upon earth the manifold functions of His pastoral office, signing His sheep in holy Baptism, guiding them

into the knowledge of the truth, carrying the weak in His bosom, bringing back again the lost by repentance, binding up the wounded with His words of consolation, feeding all souls that follow Him with the food of eternal life, folding them within the pale of salvation. What the Church does on earth, it does in His power and name; and He, through it, fulfils His own shepherd care. This, then, is the external ministration of His goodness.

2. But once more. His love and care are shewn not only in the external and visible provision which He thus made beforehand for the perpetual wants of His flock, but in the continual and internal providence wherewith He still watches over it. The whole history of His Church from the beginning—the ages of persecution, and "times of refreshing;" the great conflicts of faith with falsehood, and of the saints with the seed of the serpent; the whole career of His Church amid the kingdoms of the earth and changes of the world, are a perpetual revelation of His love and power. He has been gathering in His sheep one by one,—apostles, prophets, martyrs, saints, the pure and the penitent, the scattered and outcast, drawing them into His one visible fold, and gathering them still more closely and intimately to Himself, bringing them within the folds of His pavilion, and into the fellowship of His peculiar visitations. All that

the Father hath given Him shall come to Him. "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep." "I know them;" "and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."[1]

The mystical number of His flock is written in the book of life; and He is ever fulfilling it; ever saying, through all the course of His Church, that which, while on earth, He spake of His elect among the Gentiles; "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold;" some not entered yet, some not born into the world; "them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."[2]

Is not this the way He has been dealing with each one of us from the time of our regeneration? Is not our whole life full of the tokens of His pastoral care? See how He has sought us out, and brought us to Himself. Although we were outwardly within His fold, yet for how many years were we in heart and in reality altogether lost, wandering in follies, plunged in deadly pitfalls. With what unwearied search did He follow us through all our blind and crooked paths. We met His eye at every turn, and beheld Him at

[1] St. John x. 14, 27-29. [2] St. John x. 16.

every winding of our evil way. Perhaps there is hardly one of us who does not feel, on looking back, that he is not able to find the ultimate and true cause of his conversion to God in any of the apparent motives which turned him from the sin in which he was persisting. If we had been left to ourselves, why should we not have held on our original course without turning at all—nay, with confidence and settled obstinacy, with perpetual deterioration and darkening of soul? What was it that turned us at one time, when we would not be turned at another? Why then, and no sooner; and if not sooner, then why at all? Why, but that the Good Shepherd had found us at length; that having never left off to seek, He had overtaken us at last. He had been always seeking; but we refused to be found.

And, surely, the same is true even in those that live religiously. Even after we were found, and our hearts turned towards the true fold; who is there that knows the difficulty of repentance,—that is, of returning from error, and from wandering without God in the world,—and does not feel that, if he had been at any time left to himself, he would have sunk down by the way, or been beguiled aside, or even turned back again? What has forced us clean away from habits which, by their perilous allurement and subtil dominion, had a

hold upon our very heart's will? What has borne us through the difficulties of humiliation, self-denial, chastisement of the flesh and spirit, through the difficulties and dangers of repentance, but that the Good Shepherd had laid us upon His shoulders, and bare us, all willing and yet unwilling, to our home and shelter? And so in like manner with all His servants. How is it that they have not fainted in the way; nor fallen behind the onward march of the true flock that follows Him; nor lacked pasture, strength, light, refreshment, consolation? How is it that none have ever been "able to pluck them out of His hand?" All the schisms and heresies of proud and evil men; all the baits of the world; all the bribes of this corrupt life; all the seductions of earthly pleasure; all the attractions of ease and sloth; all the powers of darkness, have spent themselves in vain against the Hand that covers His elect. He has kept and folded us from ten thousand ills, when we did not know it: in the midst of our security we should have perished every hour, but that He sheltered us, "from the terror by night and from the arrow that flieth by day"—from the powers of evil that walk in darkness, from snares of our own evil will. He has kept us even against ourselves, and saved us even from our own undoing. Surely, though He had not taken to Himself this loving and

blessed Name, our own lives would have taught us to call Him the Good Shepherd.

Let us, then, meditate on this Name of love. Let us read the traces of His hand in all our ways, in all the events, the chances, the changes of this troubled state. It is He that dispenses all. It is He that folds and feeds us, that makes us to go in and out—to be faint, or to find pasture—to lie down by the still waters, or to walk by the way that is parched and desert. He hath said, "I know My sheep;" not their number only, but their needs; their particular state, character, temptations, trials, dangers, and infirmities. I know them what they are, and what they must suffer and do to enter into the everlasting fold. And not only does He *know* His sheep, but He "calleth His own sheep by name." By that new name which in baptism He gave to them; a type of the new name which He will one day give—the "name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." In this is expressed the familiar and intimate knowledge He has of our most hidden and secret condition of heart, of our joys, sorrows, losses, desires, fears, and hopes, of all our varying moods of mind, and all that makes up our very selves. He knows all—as we know those nearest and most beloved—and far more deeply and intensely still—by the divine intuition of His eyes,

which pierce into our inmost depths. When He says, "I know My sheep by name," He means, that there is nothing in them which He does not know; there is not one forgotten, not one passed over, as He telleth them morning and evening. His eyes are upon us all. And all the complex mystery of our spiritual being, all our secret motions of will, our daily sorrows, fears, and thoughts, are seen and read with the unerring gaze of our Divine Lord.

Whatsoever, therefore, befal us, let us say: It is He. It is the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is His rod and His staff which smite and comfort me. It is the work of One that loves me above measure, and cares for me with a sleepless providence. "The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing." This will convert all things into revelations of His nearness and of His compassion. If it be disappointment, perhaps we were too bold and confident, and there were in our course pitfalls and death. If it be sickness, we were getting to be self-trusting, self-sufficing, unconscious of weakness, averse from humiliations. If it be long anxieties, perhaps we were settling down in this life with too full a rest. If our long anxieties have shaped themselves at length into the realities of sorrow, it was that we needed this for our very life; that nothing less would work in

us His will, and our salvation; that the keen edge must come, or we must perish. Let us thus learn to taste, and to see that He is with us—that all things which befal us are just such as our truest friend would desire and do for our good. They are His doing—and that is enough. Let our heart's cry be, "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon."[1] So let us follow Him now "whithersoever He goeth." Be our path through joy or sorrow—in the darkness or in the light—in the multitude of His flock or in a solitary way, let us follow on to the fold which is pitched upon the everlasting hills, where the true flock shall "pass under the hand of Him that telleth them," one by one, till all the lost be found, and all His elect come in.

[1] Song of Solomon i. 7.

SERMON II.

THE TRUE SHEEP.

St. John x. 14.

"I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine."

Our Lord here says, that He and His sheep know each other; that His knowledge of them is one of the tokens of the Good Shepherd; and that their knowledge of Him is one of the tokens of the true sheep. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name; and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for

they know not the voice of strangers." "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." "But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."[1]

Now what is this knowledge by which His true sheep are known?

There are many kinds of knowledge, of which only one can be the true.

There is a knowledge which even fallen angels have of Him. St. James tells us that "the devils believe and tremble." St. Luke, that the spirit of an unclean devil cried out in Christ's presence "with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God;" and that "devils came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And He rebuking them suffered them not to speak; for they knew that He was Christ." And others again "cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?"[2] This is a knowledge of the spiritual intelligence, which may be

[1] St. John x. 1-5, 14, 26, 27.

[2] St. Luke iv. 33, 34, 41; St. Matt. viii. 29.

possessed in energetic wickedness, and with direct resistance of the will against the will of Christ.

Again, there is also a knowledge which all the regenerate possess. The preaching of the Church, the reading of Holy Scriptures, the public commemoration of fasts and festivals, the tradition of popular Christianity, and all the knowledge which from childhood we unconsciously imbibe, give us a general knowledge of the evangelical facts and of the history of our Lord. But besides and before all this, there is a knowledge which is in the grace of regeneration itself. There is in every living soul, born again of the Holy Ghost, a gift of enlightening. The great truths and laws of God's kingdom are as a germ implanted in the conscience; latent, indeed, and undeveloped, but there in virtue and in power. For this cause, baptism is called our illumination.[1] It is impossible to say what it may bestow upon the spiritual capacities of the soul; what faculties and perceptions, what passive and subtil qualities may be infused into us by our regeneration.

There seems to be in those who are baptized, whether holy or unholy, an inward sense which hardly so much answers to truth as anticipates it. They know it almost before they hear it. They, as it were, forebode it before it is declared. As the

[1] Heb. x. 32.

whole power of number seems by nature to exist in children, needing only to be wisely elicited by questions and leading thoughts; so in those who are born again, the first axioms and principles of truth seem mysteriously impressed by the grace of baptism.

The knowledge of Christ, of His name and person, that He is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, born of the Virgin, crucified, buried, risen, ascended into heaven, and coming again to judge both the quick and the dead, all these things seem as a sort of second consciousness, which men may sin against, but cannot get rid of. It clings to them whatsoever they do, wheresoever they go, howsoever they deny it. The worldly, trifling, lightminded; the impure, false, and sensual; even blasphemers, scoffers, infidels,—all are held in a bondage of consciousness, which, like the unseen but all-seeing Eye, follows them everywhere. It pierces them with fear, and, when they sin, turns their hearts within them into stone. It is this that makes evil men so irritable, sullen, reckless, and desperate. When they are most raging and vehement against the truth, it is because it is then most intensely torturing them. We often think that men are beyond the power of truth, because they turn with so much wrath against it, defying and bitterly reviling it. But all this vehement

emotion shews how deep the barbs have pierced, and what a struggle and convulsion of soul they are making to tear out the truth which galls them. Their anger gives the lie to their professed unbelief. It is one of the offices of truth to reveal this wickedness of the human spirit; and their very opposition is a testimony to the Divine character of truth itself. Theirs is as the testimony of the unclean spirits: "Art Thou come to torment us before the time? We know Thee who Thou art: the Holy One of God." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."[1] It is Truth doing its work of just judgment upon sinners. What some take as an evidence against their regeneration is, indeed, the proof of it. Why is the wickedness of an angel worse than that of a man? Because he holds a higher nature in unrighteousness.

It is this same passive capacity, kept from great perversions, and instructed by the teaching and worship of the Church, which makes up the knowledge of most baptized people; of such, I mean, as live Christian lives in the main; that is to say, the great bulk of those who are

[1] St. John iii. 19, 20.

blameless and orderly within the fold of the visible Church. It is a kind of unenergetic knowledge; an illumination, which shines mildly, but truly, clearly but faintly; and in hearts that cast many shadows upon themselves. The Christian knowledge of such persons is little more than a history of moving events, or a theory of pure morality, or a scheme of elevated doctrine. It is, so far, their guide, their law of life, their consolation: but their knowledge of Christ is something retrospective rather than present, of a fact rather than of a Person, having a relation to His life on earth rather than to His presence now. The way in which most Christians speak of Him is more as of a system than as of a Lord; and His name stands rather as a symbol of a doctrine than as a title of One that is living and mighty; whose searching insight "is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Such indeed is He whom men quote and speak of as a term equivalent with Christianity. He is a Divine Person, not an abstract name: One to whom we are all laid bare; "neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; for all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."[1]

[1] Heb. iv. 13.

This, then, cannot be the knowledge of which the Good Shepherd spoke when He said, "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine." It must be something of a deeper kind, something more living and personal. It is plainly, therefore, such a knowledge as He has of us. It is that mutual consciousness of which we speak when we say that we know any person as our friend. We do not mean that we know him by name; for many strangers we know by name; many whom we have never seen, or further care to know: neither do we mean only that we know all about him, that is to say, who he is, and whence, of what lineage, or from what land, or what has been his history, his acts and words, and the like; for in this way we may be said to know many who do not know us, and with whom we have nothing to do. When we say we know any one as our friend, we mean that we know not only who he is, but what, or as we say, his character,—that he is true, affectionate, gentle, forgiving, liberal, patient, selfdenying; and still more, that he has been, and is, all this to ourselves; that we have made trial of him, and have cause to know this character as a reality, of which we have, as it were, tasted, by often meeting with him, seeing him at all times, under all circumstances and in all changes, familiarly conversing with him, doing service to him, ourselves receiving

from him in turn tokens of love and goodness. It is in this way we know our friends; what they are, what they mean, wish, and imply; how they would judge, speak, and act in all cases; what every look, tone, and word signifies. It is a knowledge, not in the understanding so much as in the heart; in the perceptions of feeling, affection, and sympathy; by which we are drawn towards them and grow to them, love them; choose them out from all others, as our advisers, guides, companions; live with them and live for them; trust in them with a feeling that we are safe in their hands, and at rest in their hearts; that they love us, and would do any thing for our good; and though we be often away from them, and alone, and at times seldom see them, yet we are as if always with them — always happy in the thought of them, knowing that they are always the same to us, and knowing, besides, both where and how we shall find them if we desire or need. This is the knowledge of friendship and of love. It is something living and personal, arising out of the whole of our inward nature, and filling all our powers and affections.

And such is the knowledge the true sheep have of the Good Shepherd. "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine." As He knows us, through and through,—all that we have been and are, all that we desire and need, hope and fear, do and

leave undone, all our thoughts, affections, purposes, all our secret acts, all our hidden life, which is hid with Him in God: so do His true sheep know Him,—His love, care, tenderness, mercy, meekness, compassion, patience, gentleness, all His forecasting and prudent watchfulness, His indulgent and pitiful condescension. They have learned it by the grace of regeneration, by the illumination of their spiritual birth, by the light of His holy Gospels, by acts of contemplation, by direct approach to Him in prayer, by ineffable communion in the holy Eucharist, by His particular and detailed guidance, by His providential discipline from childhood all along the path of life. It is the knowledge of heart with heart, soul with soul, spirit with spirit; a sense of presence and companionship: so that when most alone, we are perceptibly least alone; when most solitary, we are least forsaken. It is a consciousness of guidance, help, and protection; so that all we do or say, and all that befals us, is shared with Him. It fills us with a certainty that in every part of our lot, in all its details, there is some purpose, some indication of His design and will, some discipline or medicine for us; some hid treasure, if we will purchase it; some secret of peace, if we will only make it our own.

Now if this be the knowledge which His sheep have of Him, it is plain that a great part of bap-

tized men do not so know Christ. The multitude of the visible Church live in the world forgetful both of Fold and Shepherd: remembering them only in direct acts of religion, which are short and few, in the midst of a busy earthly life of buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, trading and toiling late and early. With the very best among us, how sadly true is this. Who is not backward in this one science which only it is needful for us to know? It is much to be feared that some persons, of seeming devotion, live on very strange to Him, and far off, knowing Him rather in the understanding and imagination, rather picturing Him upon their fancy in the garb and parable of the Good Shepherd, than realising with any true and vivid spiritual consciousness the truth and blessedness of His pastoral love and care.

Let us, then, consider in what way we may attain this knowledge, which is not of the understanding, but of the heart; not of the mere intellect, but in the consciousness of the soul.

1. First, it must be by following Him. "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me." By living such a life as He lived. Likeness to Him is the power of knowing Him. Nay, rather it is knowledge itself: there is no other. It cannot be by the knowledge of eye, or ear, nor by the knowledge of imagination or thoughts, but by the

knowledge of the will, and of the spiritual reason instructed by the experience of faith. It is by likeness that we know, and by sympathy that we learn. "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in Him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked." "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."[1] What fellowship can an impure soul have with One Who knew no sin: or the self-indulgent with the Crucified: or the vain with Him that "made Himself of no reputation:" or a mind that is bounded about by this world, and content to move within its narrow sphere, in an aimless life of levities and follies, with Him who came into this world for one end alone, "that He might bring us unto God?" Such as these can have no fellowship with Christ; and if no fellowship, then no knowledge, which comes by sympathy, by partaking of His Spirit and of His life. We may read, study, toil, write, talk, preach, and make discourses which will illuminate, and move others to tears, while we ourselves are cold

[1] St. John ii. 3-6; i. 6

and dark. So too, we may profess and pray, with our lips; be strict and regular in the ordinary works and offices of religion: and all in vain, so long as our hearts and spiritual life are out of sympathy with His. How strange and perverse we are. That which is plainest to learn, we put off to the last; that which needs most grace to know, we take for our alphabet. How long shall we go on professing to judge of His doctrine, before we have begun to learn the imitation of His life? Surely the plainest and first lesson is, to follow His steps. This is the first work of our probation, the first condition of His guidance. If we would only take the Sermon on the Mount, and read it, not as the world has paraphrased it, but as He spoke it; if we would only fulfil it, not as men dispense with it, but as He lived it upon earth; we should begin to know somewhat of those deeper perceptions of His love, tenderness, and compassion, which are the peace of His elect. Such obedience has a searching and powerful virtue to quicken and make keen the faculties of our conscience. And it would change our whole view of the Christian life, from a solitary observance of an abstract rule of duty, into an abiding relation towards a personal and living Master. It would make men to feel that not only the general and confused sum of life shall, in the end of time, be brought into judgment, but that every deed and

thought, every motive of the heart and inclination of the will, are full of pregnant meaning; of obedience or of disobedience, of loyalty or betrayal, to the person of our Lord: that our every-day life is either in the track of His footsteps, or gone astray from the one only path that leadeth unto life. This is the first step to a true knowledge of Christ.

2. And, further than this: there are peculiar faculties of the heart which must be awakened, if we would know Him as He knows us. There can be no true obedience without the discipline of habitual devotion. By this is signified something far deeper than the habits of prayer which we commonly maintain. As obedience to Christ impresses us with a sense of His personality, so devotion awakens a perception of His presence. And how easy it is to pray for years with little or no sense of His nearness—with a dim, cold syllogism of the necessary presence of One that must be here, because He is God, for God is everywhere—we all unhappily know. Half our difficulties in prayer, half the irksomeness of the act, the wearisomeness of the posture, the wandering of our hearts, the distraction of our thoughts, may be traced to this one great lack,—the lack of a deep consciousness of His personal presence. And therefore it is our prayers gain for us so little light, so faint an insight into His mind

and perfection, so clouded a knowledge of His love and will towards us. If we truly *knew* Him, we should delight to speak with Him, to linger and dwell in His presence. We should go from our prayers with the slow hearts we now bring to them. How should we lay up all day long our thoughts, cares, forebodings, to lighten our hearts at night by pouring them out before Him. We should then somewhat understand the words, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." And this would open to us the words of Holy Scripture, which to most are so remote, involved, and perplexing. Perhaps there is no book that is so much read and so little really understood, because so little dwelt upon. And why, but because meditation implies the intensity and affection of a devout mind? Prayer and meditation are so nearly one, that we may pass and repass from the one to the other, almost without perceptible transition. Not that they are indeed one and the same: but meditation is the food of prayer, and prayer is the life of meditation, and they are therefore inseparable. It is for want of these deeper and more stedfast thoughts that we go on through life reading Holy Scripture without piercing beneath the letter. And this cursory and superficial habit of mind keeps up our insensibility of the presence of Christ.

Moreover, it is the same unimpressed and unawakened temper of heart that leads men to live on in habitual neglect of the holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood. They have no sense of hunger and thirst, no consciousness of any inward craving, no need felt of sustenance, no perception of the constraining love of Him who, in the night of His betrayal, left that command to prove the faith and love of His Church for ever. Now a Christian, in this torpid unawakened state, cannot know Him with the knowledge of His true sheep. There is something which deadens and stifles the spiritual affections. Cold devotions will make a man's heart dark. Let him profess what he will, let him in the intellect know what he may, into the true knowledge which comes by love and likeness to Christ he cannot enter. A life of devotion, that is, of frequent and fervent worship of our Divine Lord, so awakens and kindles the whole inward heart, that there is nothing more real and blissful to a Christian than to escape from all the world into the presence of the only and true Shepherd. And this is tested above all in the mystery of the holy Communion. The eyes of many are, by their own want of insight, long holden so as not to know Him, until He makes Himself known in the breaking of bread. Even though all along their intellect have been opened to understand the

Scriptures, there is a knowledge still higher, still more personal and intimate, which they cannot have till He manifests Himself in that blessed Sacrament. There is a marked and visible distinction between those who know Him by the intellect, and those who know Him by the heart; those who have sought to know Him by mere reading, and those who have sought to know Him by communion. The holy Eucharist is the very life-bread of His true servants. It is their very Gospel, not written with pen and ink, but by a pierced hand, and in the blood of the Good Shepherd. There even the unlettered Christian, the weakest of His flock, learns what doctors in the temple neither teach nor know. A life of devout and frequent communion is the true and infallible way to a personal knowledge and experience of His love. What things He may make known to us in that holy mystery, each will understand. They are not to be spoken or known by hearsay. But He has promised an ineffable fellowship to them that devoutly open their hearts to receive His visitation. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."[1]

3. And lastly, this true knowledge of Him is not

[1] Rev. iii. 20.

a transitory state of feeling. Out of obedience and devotion arises an habitual faith, which makes Him, though unseen, yet perceptibly a part of all our life. Without this we shall but run great risks of deceiving ourselves. This strong and sustained consciousness of His presence makes all things within the veil more real than those we see. The Unseen Head of the Church living and glorified; the mystical body knit in one by the Holy Ghost; the Good Shepherd tending His one fold on the everlasting hills; the familiar image of His loving countenance;—all these, all day long, in the midst of work and in their hour of rest, at home and abroad, among men or in solitude, are spread before the sight of hearts that know Him by love.

Let us then seek, in this way, so to know Him. He will guide us in a sure path, though it be a rough one: though shadows hang upon it, yet He will be with us. If we be His true flock, we shall lack nothing. He will bring us home at last. Through much trial it may be, and weariness, in much fear and fainting of heart, in much sadness and loneliness, in griefs that the world never knows, and under burdens that the nearest never suspect. Yet He will suffice for all. By His eye or by His voice He will guide us, if we be docile and gentle; by His staff and by

His rod, if we wander or are wilful: any how, and by all means, He will bring us to His rest. Not one shall perish, except we be stedfastly bent upon our own perdition. Blessed are they who so know Him. They alone are truly happy; they alone have that which will fill all hearts, stay all desires, and make even the broken spirit to be glad. He is enough: even "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." He is "a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."[1] Who is parched and wearied by the glare and drought of this dazzling and dangerous world? "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will refresh you." Say: Even so, Lord, make me to know Thee. It is the unreasonableness, the wilfulness, the self-love of my heart, that will not know Thee. Take away all these, which hide Thee from me. The veil is not upon Thy Face, but upon my heart. "Lord, that I may receive my sight." For "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

[1] Isaiah xxv. 4; xxxii. 2.

SERMON III.

THE GREAT MOTIVE.

COLOSSIANS iii. 17.

"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

THIS great command is here given between some of the highest, and some of the homeliest duties of the Christian life. St. Paul, a little before, has said, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." He then presses upon the Colossians the great mysteries of the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, as incitements to a holy life. He bids them live as men dead to the world, living in and to God alone, in mortification, purity, devotion, and peace. After these high counsels of saintliness, he gives a series of minute and homely precepts to wives and husbands, parents and children, and servants and masters: and then, between these two branches of his exhortation, he says, "Whatsoever ye do in

word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus;" shewing us that all duties are sacred, and that none are too little to be done for Christ's sake.

Now in these words St. Paul gives us the great *motive* of Christian obedience.

When God in the beginning created man in His own image, the aim or motive of his obedience was God; His will, bliss and glory. After the fall, by perversion, it became, in manifold shapes, his own self; self-pleasing, self-indulgence, and self-worship. This was the true fall of mankind. The Divine law of order was lost, and man's spiritual being was confounded by the turbulence of his own fallen nature. It had no law, or supreme control, and so became its own bondage and affliction. This has been the source of all sin and sorrow to mankind. His nature had lost its key-stone, and fell into a ruin. It was this great want of a governing law or motive which was again filled up by the Gospel of Christ. The true principle, or moving cause, of all obedience in man is the Name of Christ. And this is what St. Paul implies in these words. Let us, then, see what this precept means—to do all in the name of Christ.

First, it means, to do all things for His sake; and that because, by the redemption of the world, we have passed into His possession. We are no

longer our own, but His. We were dead; He has made us to live again: we were condemned, He has blotted out the doom that was against us: we were under the powers of sin, and He has set us free. Not only are all gifts from Him, but we ourselves have the very gift of our new and spiritual life through His incarnation and His atonement on the cross. Therefore St. Paul says in another place, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (that is, all died with Him): "and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."[1] "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."[2] And again, "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."[3]

But, further, to do all in His name, means to do all in His sight. When He was upon earth, His apostles saw and conversed with Him. They went in and out at His bidding. All they did and said was as in His presence, and in His hearing. Whether they were with Him in the mountain or on the sea, by the wayside or in the Temple, He saw all and knew all. Even the words they spoke among themselves in secret,

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [2] 1 Cor. vi. 20. [3] 1 Cor. iii. 23.

and the thoughts that arose, as they journeyed, in their hearts,—all was manifest to Him. So it was before He suffered. After He rose from the dead, still more. In those forty days of mysterious abiding upon earth, whether seen or no, He watched all their ways, noted every thought. They were under His penetrating gaze while they communed of Him and of His departure; while they toiled all night upon the sea of Galilee: or wondered among themselves when He should reveal Himself again. And not less—nay, even more—when He went up into heaven, after He had sent them forth into all the earth, and said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He sent them into all lands, and He went with them unseen. In market-places and before councils, in prisons and in travel, in the desert and on the deep, He was always near. And His presence has abode with their lineal successors even to this hour. This high promise stands sure. His invisible fellowship is with us still, not less than with them. What is the Church, but the presence of Christ, and the company of the apostles, drawn out unto the world's end? What is the visible Church, but the very fellowship of the eleven who were gathered in the upper chamber, then personal and local, now universal and perpetual? With Him time is not. He reigns in time, but His presence

is neither past nor to come, but now and always: seen and unseen is nothing in Christ's kingdom; visibleness is but an accident. He sees us here and now, as He saw them at Emmaus, or on the mountain of ascension. All our whole life bears the same relation to Him as theirs; and ought, therefore, to be governed by the same abiding consciousness. Wheresoever we be, whatsoever we are doing, in all our work, in our busy daily life, in all schemes and undertakings, in public trusts, and in private retreats, He is with us, and all we do is spread before Him. Do it, then, as to the Lord. Let the thought of His eye unseen be the motive of your acts and words. Do nothing you would not have Him see. Say nothing which you would not have said before His visible presence. This, again, is to do all in His name.

And, once more, to do all in Christ's name, means, further, to do all as a witness for Him.

This was the commission of the apostles. He bade them tarry in Jerusalem till they had received power from on high; and then, He said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."[1] "And ye are witnesses of these things;"[2] that is, of His incarnation, teaching, and miracles, of His passion and

[1] Acts i. 8. [2] St. Luke xxiv. 48.

resurrection, of His mysteries and sacraments, of His ascension and perpetual presence, of the whole invisible kingdom of their exalted Head. This was the witness of the apostles. And they bare it by their preaching and suffering, but chiefly by their purity of life. He that overcame sin and death, when He went up on high, endowed them with His own power to overcome death and sin. "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me."[1] "All power is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore."[2] The whole apostolic ministry—the founding and expansion of the Church throughout the world—its resistless might against all opposition —its universal mastery, overthrowing altars, temples, legions, kingdoms, and whatsoever reared itself against the cross,—all this was a visible witness for Christ. It proved that they were the living members of a living Head; that in them He was still ever going forth with the armies of heaven, conquering, and to conquer. They were the witnesses of the true and only King, who reigns, conquers, and governs in heaven and in earth. And this is our work and trial now. There are, at this very hour, two kingdoms in presence of each other. The world is still divided between the kingdom of Christ and

[1] St. Luke xxii. 29. [2] St. Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.

the kingdom of antichrist. For one or for the other, every man must be. These two kingdoms have their standards, powers, and tribunals. The one, loud, pompous, and majestic, gorgeous in its apparel and in the pageantry of its strength. In its train are pleasures, honours, decorations, high estate, refinement, luxury, and splendour. This is the kingdom of the world, and its glory. The other is lowly and despised—its ensign a cross, and its crown a wreath of thorns; in its retinue are the poor and slighted—its badges are sorrows, stigmas, and wrongs. It has no splendour of outward array—no legions but the army of martyrs—no throne but one that is set in heaven. Between these you must make your choice; and yet your choice is already foregone and past. It was made for you in your baptism. You are set here to witness—by the confession of your baptismal faith, in word and deed—by acts of visible worship, especially in the sacrament of His death and passion—by visible purity of heart—by a life like His—by His light shining in you and from you, overcoming the world, be it in the highest or the lowest paths of life, in the homeliest and the simplest duties of every day. None are too humble, or too weak, to witness for the Holy Name. In the crush and struggle of the world, you are on trial at every turn; and your truth,

loyalty, and faith, are being always proved. A thousand tests touch you on every side: even in the still measured round of domestic life, in the home duties of parents, children, and brethren, if your motive is His name, and your law is His example, if your life be pure and gentle, it bears all day long a clear-toned witness for your Lord.

This, then, is to do all in His name;—to do all for His sake, in His sight, and in witness for His person and His kingdom. But who can hear it without trembling? If this be our calling, what must be our judgment? Our election is fearful and blessed: to live for His name in Whose blood alone we can wash our sins, our prayers, and our repentance.

Let us try, as best we may, to lay this great truth to heart, by dwelling on some direct and practical inferences from it, bearing upon our daily life. It shews us, then:

1. First, that sin in a Christian is a plain denial of Christ. It denies His name more emphatically than to say, "I know not the man." In early times, when the Church was under heathen persecution, Christians were required by the enemies of Christ to deliver up their sacred vessels, the paten and the chalice of the holy Eucharist, and the volumes of Holy Scripture. By giving up these consecrated trusts, they might make an easy

purchase of life; and, more than this, they were led to the lighted altars of Pagan worship, and if they would so much as cast a grain of incense upon the glowing embers, they were set free. But these light acts were pregnant with an intense meaning. They were implicit denials of the name of Christ, constructive treason against the kingdom of the Son of God. His true servants rather died than deny Him by so much as this silent homage to the kingdom of darkness, by the slightest ambiguous motion of hands or lips. Such is our probation now. The least acts of sin are louder than the loudest recital of the faith. One such act drowns all our confessions and creeds. They make themselves heard above all our specious and weak words of religious intention. One sin of sensuality, pride, falsehood, or malignity, deliberately conceived, consciously put in act, is an overt and high rebellion. For what is it but to take the side of antichrist, in the warfare between heaven and earth — to swell the powers of darkness, and to lift up our weapons among the banners of the evil one? Sometimes the greatest secret treachery is found under a religious cloak, as in schism for spurious charity and lax indulgence of other men's sins. But howsoever concealed, it is only an illusion of Satan. Sometimes it is by a temper contrary to this. Insubordination, uncha-

ritableness, a bitter spirit, selfish insensibility of the spiritual dangers of those for whom Christ died, these again are so many denials of His name. What will it avail at that day to say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name: and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?"[1] "We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you I know you not."[2]

2. And another truth following from the last, is, that worldliness is a suppressed contradiction and secret betrayal of Christ. "He gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world."[3] "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."[4] We "cannot serve two masters;" we cannot be a link between two spiritual opposites. There is no neutrality between the world and God. God is the eternal fountain of truth, purity, and peace. The world without God is false, impure, and turbulent; a mighty heaving confusion of fallen spirits wrestling with each other and with God. As such the world is in eternal opposition to Him. It can only be reconciled by passing out of itself into His kingdom; by receiving the laws of truth and obedience,

[1] St. Matt. vii. 22.
[2] St. Luke xiii. 26, 27.
[3] Gal. i. 4.
[4] James iv. 4.

of holiness and order, that is, in ceasing to be the world, and being taken up into the will of God. Besides the grosser kinds of sensual and spiritual evil, this world has a multitude of refined and subtil powers of enmity against the Divine will. There is, besides the lust of the flesh, also the lust of the eyes; the vain-glory, pomp, glitter, ostentation of ease, luxury, and self-pleasing; and there is, moreover, the pride of life, the stately self-worship, the fastidious self-contemplation of intellectual or secular men. And with this comes also a throng of less elevated sins,—levity, love of pleasure, full fare, a thirst for money, a hunger for popularity, and its debasing successes. These things steal away the heart, and make men false to their Heavenly Master. Their obedience becomes habitually double, vain-glorious, self-advancing; or heartless, hollow, and reluctant. If they do not by express acts betray Him, it is either because they are not tempted, or because they would lose in the scale of the world's esteem or in their own. Surely there must be something highly incensing to our Heavenly Master in such earthly hearts, all fair outside, but eaten out by the world even to the core.

3. Let us, then, learn farther, that obedience in His name, for His sake, and in His sight, is the only obedience which is stedfast and persevering.

It is the only obedience that is sincere. No other obedience springs from the heart. This is a principle not to be swayed by custom or reputation, or by the maxims and eyes of men. It is always the same, in every place, season, and state. All other motives change with our outward circumstances, with the judgments, tone, wishes, suggestions of those about us. But this is internal, self-supported, and unchangeable. And as it never changes, so it is ever gaining strength, ever advancing, uniting the whole power of the mind in one aim and force, binding all the affections of the heart about the conscience and the will, ever growing in self-command, in the pure happiness of conscious sincerity, and in the sensitive discernment of a tender conscience.

In such a character all the complex motives of daily life are sanctified. The one governing purpose, that is, to do all in the name of Christ, consecrates them all. The healthy play of all pure and natural affection is not crossed, but perfected by the control of a higher principle. God has made man's heart manifold in its thoughts and emotions; and for all these He has ordained a manifold counterpart in the scheme of perfect obedience. No doubt, when Solomon saw the Temple of God rising in silence and beauty, a multitude of thoughts stirred within him. The stately shafts

and polished corners, the sculptured chapiters, and elaborate grace of the house, which was "exceeding magnifical," filled his eye and soul with forms of beauty, and suggestions of more than visible perfection. There was a pure and hallowed pleasure distinct from the one presiding consciousness that all this was for the dwelling of the Most High God. So in all the sphere of our life. In our homes and relative affections, in our lawful use of God's good creatures, in our honest labours, in our temperate ease, in all works of mercy and devotion; though a complex multitude of thoughts and emotions work upon us, it is but the various movement of one manifold and mysterious nature, created in the image of Him Who, though manifold, is One. All these motives are pure in His sight, and all accepted of Him for Christ's sake, in whose name our highest and governing purposes are all conceived. There is no discord so long as they are subordinate. As all harmony, however intricate, has some one tone high and dominant, by which all are united in a perfect strain. And this chief aim, if not always consciously before us, yet may be always habitual in our minds. The presence of Christ may be our ruling motive, even when the thought of His presence is, for a time, suspended. We do not cease to be affected by the will of a friend, though we be not always looking

upon him. Sometimes the very depth and fulness of our habitual feeling makes us less conscious of its detailed and momentary action. Like the power of sight and hearing, we do not reflect upon them while we hear and see; or like the fondest affections, which are seldom uttered, so taken for granted as to be passed by in silence, never transgressed, though never abstracted from the thoughts and words which flow from them all day long.

This, then, is our law of life in this confused and perilous world. It will be good to try ourselves daily by this rule. The first thing in the morning, offer all your intentions and all the works of the day to God. During the day, renew this intention by intervals of prayer, or by momentary aspirations. Before you begin any new work, ask,—"Am I doing this for His name? Can I do this in His sight? Will He accept this as done for His sake? Can I ask His blessing upon it? Can I offer it up to Him?" If you are met by difficulties, renew the consciousness for Whom you are at work. If tempted to impatience or to anger, or to resentment, say this holy Name in secret to yourself. If you suffer, call to mind, "This I suffer for Him who suffered all for me. This is my cross for His sake, the shadow of His cross for mine." Be it sickness, pain, anguish, anxiety, sorrow, solitude, it is all one; we may join it to His sorrows and

to the darkness of His Cross. In this you will find consolation, strength, guidance, ever fresh and ever near. This will keep your feet in all your ways, be they never so slippery, be they never so strait. His Name, through faith in His Name, shall hold you up. In a little while, where will be all the things that we are fretting about? Where will be honours, wealth, power, ambition, high place, science, learning, pleasures, and refinement? Where will be home and its soft cares, its keen anxieties, its tender affections, its blinding attachments? Where will all these be, when the sign of the Son of Man shall be seen in heaven?

Live, then, in obedience to that great law which binds heaven and earth in one. All things on high worship Him; to Him all things in earth and under the earth bow the knee. The Name of Jesus is the law of angels, archangels, principalities, and powers; it is the healing of penitents, the song of God's elect. Be it your motive and your law, and it shall be your strength and stay; your shield, and your exceeding great reward.

SERMON IV.

HALTING BETWEEN GOD AND THE WORLD.

1 Kings xviii. 21.

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him."

After the separation of Israel and Judah, the kingdom of Israel fell into gross idolatry. Jeroboam, foreseeing that if the people went up to Jerusalem to sacrifice in the House of the Lord, they would turn from him to the kingdom of Judah, took counsel, and set up two calves of gold, and made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people. All this he did as a scheme of policy, to keep the people of Israel under his allegiance. The effect of it was, that they soon fell into the idolatries of the Zidonians and Ammonites. Baal was the god of the Zidonians, and his worship was set up by Ahab, through his marriage with Jezebel, daughter of

Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians. He also made a grove for the rites of idol worship. Idolatry became the popular and national tradition; the whole force and support of public opinion sustained it; all the presumptions and usages of public and private life were full of it; all things around them confessed Baal, his godhead, and his worship. They were thoroughly possessed with a belief of his divinity. To dispute it was to attack a sort of religious common sense.

This was the state of Israel when Elijah was sent from God to gather out the remnant of His elect. His witness and his miracles had confounded, and half convinced the people. Some were, perhaps, altogether convinced in secret; but they hung in suspense, wavering and doubting what to do. Baal was strong, and his worship was loud and splendid. The prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred; and they were in the favour and protection of the royal house. They did "eat at Jezebel's table." I need not recount the detail of this well-known history. In a word, Elijah challenged them to a trial on the heights of Carmel. There they built an altar, and laid on it a sacrifice, and invoked fire from Baal to consume it in token of his power and godhead. And Elijah mocked them as "they cried and cut them-

selves with knives and lancets." And when the heaven was serene and silent, and there was no voice, nor any to answer, in the fury of despair they leaped upon the altar and broke it down. When mid-day was past, Elijah builded an altar of twelve stones in the Name of the Lord, and laid the sacrifice upon it, and poured water thrice upon it, and filled the trench round about it with water. And about the time of the evening sacrifice, he came near and said, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel." "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and they said, The Lord He is the God; the Lord He is the God."

Now this history strikingly illustrates a very common fault of character. I mean, indecision in religion.

First, we have here a type of the worship of the world set up within the Church of God; and of the insensibility which comes upon worldly Christians. The greater part of men, if they do not grieve and resist the Spirit of their baptism, fall into a low, dim, relaxed Christianity, which is the Christianity of the world. They are nomi-

nally Christians ; but splendour, society, rank, high connexions, great friends, money, pleasure, and the like, are the real objects of their anxiety and labour, — that is, of their worship. To such people the rule of life is the custom of the majority. Their standard of judgment is the opinion of those by whom they wish to be well thought of. They measure their duties by the example of the patrons whom they serve or follow. Their maxim and theory of life are founded upon the average practice of the society in which they live. Their religion is the religion of the greater number. What is practicable in religion is what the world will allow them to fulfil. Whatever is beyond it, is overstrained, indiscreet, singular, and in bad taste. Sometimes, many better qualities are mingled in such minds ; as, for example, reverence for established usages, the customs of former generations, the names of forefathers, and the like. But these, though they mitigate the personal fault of yielding to the way of the world, do not change the quality of indecision, nor avert the danger of it.

The effect of all this is, to produce a dulness of spiritual perception. Whatever is above the average standard is to them enthusiastic and visionary, or conceited and singular. The precepts and counsels of devotion and holy living are to them refinements and excess. They cannot see

them to be a duty, or to be profitable, or even to be safe. Such minds have either very faint, or no clear insight or faculties of the Spirit, to which you can appeal. The more perfect forms of holiness, which ought to be instincts in the regenerate, must be laboriously proved to them. The higher those precepts are, the more need of proof.

What is the plain meaning of all this? It is, that the world weighs heavy upon the visible mass of Christians, and lowers them to its own standard. Only individuals rise above it; and the mass keep each other in countenance; denouncing them as dreamers. "The prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men, and the prophets of the grove four hundred men," and "they eat at Jezebel's table." The world loves its own, and follows them because they wait upon it.

But next we see here how light sometimes forces itself upon such people. God sends to them a witness and a warning. Sickness, danger, the loss of those they love, worldly adversity, such as ruin of fortune, disappointments, and the like:—these things make them look deeper than the surface. They find the world's religion to be an imposture, a conspiracy to keep up a decent appearance, and to keep out the stern reality of the Cross. Little by little they begin to see that ease, glitter, smoothness, comfort, a free life, a fair opinion of themselves,

are not the signs of Christ's servants ; that in such things there are no tokens of the Crucifixion. These are not the array of repentance, nor fit trappings for fallen sinners. They begin, therefore, to doubt the truth of their past self-persuasion ; they begin to see that their active thoughts and powers are bestowed with a fearful concentration upon this world, and that God and His kingdom are but faintly remembered: that their prayers and repentance are not states and habits, but momentary acts or feelings. Their whole life of private devotion, perhaps, would not fill one hour in the twenty-four. Whatever is right, this must be wrong. New truths then begin to glimmer,—old truths, long slighted, to break out full upon them. They see enough to convince them that they cannot go on as in time past; that they have been walking in a vain show; that their religion has been a dream, and that the world has been their reality; and that this is an open contradiction of Divine Truth ; for " the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

They are, in this way, brought to a stand between two things. On the one side is the world, as loud, fair, alluring, persuasive, commanding, as before. On the other is an inward world, which has burst upon their conscience,—awful, majestic,

and eternal. Between old habits and new convictions, how shall they steer their course? Can they break away from the world, forsake its pleasures, refuse its gifts, endure its enmity, bear its scorn? Dare they turn from the light of the Spirit, the Passion of Christ, the kingdom of God? What shall they do? It is not hard to tell what in the end many will do. They will "halt between two opinions." They try to reconcile their new and unwelcome convictions with their old life of worldly aims and practice. Sometimes they plunge into them even still deeper, if by any means they may escape the light of truth. But it follows them into every path. They go back to the same frivolities and follies, the same hollow vanity and noisy levities. They try to drown the warning of Him who stands at the door and knocks. But all in vain. His hand has a thrilling stroke, which pierces through every other sound;—through the mirth of feasting and loud revels, laughter and gladness, and the voice of music. It has a thrill which penetrates the ear,—clear, articulate, and emphatic. They cannot choose but hear, and know Who calls them. It is the Voice come again. They hurry to and fro to elude the pursuit of conscience; but go where they will, the truth is there before them. He meets them in every house, stands on the threshold of every door, sits at every board, is

first in every throng. He besets them behind and before, ever saying, "How long halt ye between the world and Me?"

This is not only a very miserable, but a very dangerous state; for such people grow to be morally impotent. To know truth, and to disobey it, weakens the whole character. Even such truths as they knew and acted on before, are enfeebled by it. The whole tone of their character is lowered. And with the loss of moral stedfastness comes loss of consistency; and with loss of consistency, loss of inward peace: then comes irritability of mind; soreness, arising out of self-reproach; bitterness to others, because they are galled by themselves. They begin to dislike the truth they shrink from, and to rebel against what they fear. Religion becomes a sore subject to them; and they grow utterly estranged. They lose both their old comfort and their new. According to that Divine and just paradox, "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."[1] O most miserable religion of the world! always promising, and never fulfilling; always fair, and always false; strict enough to vex the soul, but not strong enough to cleanse the heart; without which cleansing, no man shall see the kingdom of God.

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 12.

Now, let us not think that this is an extreme or uncommon case. I have only stated broadly what in some degree is true of perhaps every one of us. It is true of every one who yields to the world more than he feels to be right; more than he would, if he dared to break with it: of every one who has light higher than his life; convictions beyond his practice: of every one who has once been more earnest, and has been *toned down*, or rather dulled and tamed by the world: of every one that is easy, consenting, unenergetic, pliant, irresolute in any degree; for just in that degree he will halt between the world and God. And who is there that can say, "This does not take hold of me?"

If this be so, let us see what is the reason of it.

The first reason is, that such people will not decide one way or another. Next to wilful sin, indecision is the most pitiable state of man. To hang in doubt between time and eternity, the world and God, a sin and a crown of life, is, we may believe, if possible, more incensing to the Divine jealousy, than open disobedience. It implies so much light, and so much sense of what is good, that doubt has no plea of ignorance. The irresolution is not in the understanding or in the conscience, but in the *will*. The fault is in the heart. It convicts them of the want of love, gratitude,

and all high desires after God: it reveals the stupor and earthliness which is still upon the soul. It proves the absence of faith; of a living consciousness of things unseen, and an active power of realising what they believe, without which faith is dead. There is upon them a spiritual insensibility, a kind of mortal apathy, a listless inattention to any thing which does not make itself felt by forcing its presence upon the senses of the body. And this at last deadens the perceptions of the soul.

Such is the moral character of indecision in religion:—surely most guilty and ungrateful in His sight Who was pierced for us. To be a member of Christ, without an earnest and kindled heart; to look unmoved on Him whom we have wounded; for this our Lord has reserved a warning of almost unexampled severity. "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the Creation of God; I know thy works: that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth."[1]

Another reason of this irresolution is, that sometimes when people have clearly decided in their own minds on the better course, they will

[1] Rev. iii. 14-16.

not act upon the decision. This is the state of many. It is a cheap thing to know what is right; to make right decisions; even to resolve. The trial is in the act. Many die in their sins, for want of moral earnestness to break them off. A weak will is their perdition. But there is even a sadder case than the end of those who never begin to act upon their faith. There are some who make a struggle, and for a while set themselves free, and seem to make their choice for ever. After a time they waver; and after wavering, go back. But they are never as they were before. As a stream, checked by a momentary dam, bursts with greater vehemence; so it is for the most part with relapsing Christians. They go back each man to his particular sin, with a harder boldness, and a sevenfold greater abandonment of life and heart. For instance, worldly people, who have been brought by sickness and sorrow to sadder and wiser thoughts, if they go back to the world again, are proverbially the most worldly of all. So in other kinds of sin: for despised truth deadens the conscience; and light departs from those who will not follow it. The darkness of a relapsed soul is of all the greatest.

Now, if this be the cause and the danger of indecision, let us see how we may detect and overcome it in ourselves.

What has been said shews—

1. That the right way to know the truth is, not speculation, but practice; not to reason about it, but to do it. There are many things which cannot be proved by reasoning; or if they can, reasoning comes in so tardily, as to form no real part of the proof; like as it is in the fact of day-light, or of our waking consciousness, or of the sight of our eyes. All these are perceived and known in act, by instincts which outstrip and go before all reflection. It is by putting the decision of the conscience and the will to the test of practice, that we become sure we have judged aright. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." For instance, people who live a free life shrink from the decided course of religion, because they think it must be austere and straitened. They would fain taste the peace, before they commit themselves to it; and ascertain its freedom, before they trust it. When they read, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire;" they think, 'If He would give me my heart's desire, I would delight myself in Him.' When our Lord says, "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye may have life;" they say in themselves, 'Give me life, and I will come;' that is, they would have life without coming. In

fact, they cannot make up their minds to trust God, and take Him at His word.

And this is specially true in respect to all doctrines of faith. People will not believe them till they see the reasons. But they never can see the reasons till they have believed. Faith is the condition on which we, who were born blind, receive our sight. Intellectual knowledge depends in chief on the spiritual perceptions. And spiritual perceptions issue out of our spiritual nature, as it is matured by faith. But faith is the decision of the soul, trusting itself altogether to the hand of God. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in *faith*, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind, and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."[1] We shall never see the harmony of truth, if we first ask for proof. When faith has received the doctrine, reason will see it as in the light of noon.

2. Another truth taught us by this is, that the effect of a faithful and decided life is to strengthen and confirm the choice we have made. There is no knowledge like the knowledge of experience.

[1] St. James i. 5-8.

How hard it is to realise the look of any country by description in a book; or to know the spirit of a man from his written life: or to appreciate sweetness from illustration, or harmony from the written language of music. How the least personal experience by sight or hearing gives to all these a vividness and reality which makes them at once part of our minds for ever. For example, people who live in a habit of prayer will tell us that it is full of peace, of a peculiar happiness. They never knew it till they tasted it: they never tasted it till they tried it. Take as a proof, those who long shrunk from frequent Communion, partly for fear of binding themselves to a stricter life, partly from a notion that frequency would produce irreverence or insensibility. Ask them, after some years of frequent Communion, they will tell you that they never thought to attain such clear and undoubting certainty of the deep reality and exceeding reward of that great precept of love: that now they have forgotten the duty in the blessedness: that it is not so much obedience as delight: that so far from losing the sweetness of that Holy Sacrament, they never tasted it before: that now they fear to lose, far more than once they feared to approach it: that a new world has opened to them, of which the altar is the centre, and the Sacrifice which lies upon it is the life. In it they see all God's mercies,

the incarnation and atonement of His Son, the love of the Holy Ghost. It is to them now as a reflection of His goodness and His beauty, His very presence and the vision of peace. And so it is in like manner also with a life of repentance, from which men recoil as from a life-long sadness. Nothing can persuade them that repentance has a peculiar calm and joy. In no way can it be realised but by actual participation. Every day deepens the sense of the Divine forgiveness: the deeper their humiliation, the sharper the yoke upon their neck, the clearer, brighter, and more serene their inmost heart. The darker it is to the eyes of the world without, the fuller of light within. What the world calls ascetic rigour and intolerable gloom, is to them freedom and the joy of a holy sadness.

There is nothing we oftener say than that sorrows are tokens of God's love; and yet when they come, how few really so receive them, and give themselves up to be led and taught by Him. They shrink, and seek out their own consolations, and shape their own ways, with a real though disguised feeling that God has made an inroad upon their peace; that they must build up again what He has overthrown. And what misery is this; to beat ourselves to pieces against the Divine will, which stands firm as necessity and iron. Even when we do not directly clash with it, yet how sore it

is to bear His rod, only because we cannot ward off His strokes. How blessed, if we would with a deliberate and decisive choice choose what He chooses; and make His will our will, His purpose our purpose, and His work our work; so that even in our sorrows we may be fellow-workers together with Him, that both by His chastisement and by our own desires we may be made "partakers of His holiness."[1] When any trial comes, then, let us not halt between His will and our own will; but say, "Thou art my God; shew me Thy intent, and accomplish Thy perfect work in me." Ask those who have sorrowed after this sort, whether even home in its brightest hours had more of peace. Ask even those who, after halting long, at last have chosen well, and are now entered on the sure though strait path of the Cross. They will tell you what is their reward; what they so nearly lost, but now have attained, by trusting God, for ever.

3. Lastly, we may see that where obedience and experience bring strength, they give also insight and intuition into the whole range of truth. As, for example, we know that God is with us from our childhood; but from the time we began to act upon that truth, how different have been our perceptions of it. How different has been our sense

[1] Heb. xii. 10.

of awe, faith, reverence, in our private prayers, and in public worship: how far higher and deeper our belief and knowledge of His mysteries of grace, of the Church, and the Holy Sacraments.

And this intuition spreads outwardly on every side, into the whole sphere of our life. All relations, duties, events, are seen under a new light; as if, after long twilight, the sun had risen upon the earth. We begin to see our real site in God's world, the end of our creation, the value of time, the true secret of our own heart, the just price of all things that "perish in the using." And this will be found true in the whole of our spiritual life.

But that we may make an end, let us come to particulars.

Are you conscious of any sin or fault, your chief one, still unsubdued; sometimes committed through weakness, sometimes willingly indulged? Perhaps you throw this into the general view of your character, as the one lingering infirmity, notwithstanding which you may look upon yourself to be religious and devout. This is plain halting between God and a besetting sin. Sometimes it may be a greater, but for the most part it is a lesser sin, as men judge, which holds Christians in their irresolute state. A great sin generally decides the balance for itself. Carefulness about money, personal vanity, ambition, love of the world's

honour, — these hold men in a state of religious indecision. Now, are they sins or not? If they are not, why does God condemn them? If they are, why do you give your hearts into their power?

And once more: are you conscious of any duty either neglected or seldom fulfilled? I will say, the reception of the Holy Sacrament. To come to the Blessed Sacrament is either a duty, or it is not. Which is it? If a duty, why do you neglect it? If not, why not say so at once? Or if it be a duty, why do you come so seldom? If not a duty, why do you come at all? Is not this halting between two opinions? Again, the Holy Sacrament is either a blessing or it is not. If it be not, why do you ever come to it? If it be, how can you turn away? Did our Lord Jesus Christ say, "This do in remembrance of Me," or did He not? If He did not, why call it a Sacrament? If He did, how can you despise His command? What halting and contradiction is all this!

Perhaps some may say, "All this is right; but I am not fit to come to the Holy Communion." And yet this only removes the indecision one step higher up. Why do you not make yourself fit? If you are not fit for the Holy Sacrament, are you fit to die? or if you hope that you are fit to die, are you not afraid of saying that you are not fit for the Holy Sacrament? Can you be fit for the

greater, and not for the less? Oh, let us make up our minds to something; let us be resolved one way or the other; let us be either cold or hot; choose life or death. But let us not deceive ourselves with a dreamy, heartless, halting Christianity. "No man can serve two masters." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." What would you give, upon a death-bed, for one short hour to be at last decided? Choose now, and choose wisely; for one false choice may become eternal. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Oh, just and awful words. Be in earnest one way or the other: for Me or against Me. "And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be."[1]

[1] Rev. xxii. 11, 12.

SERMON V.

THE SINS THAT FOLLOW US.

1 Timothy v. 24.

"Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after."

The special intention of St. Paul in these and the foregoing words, was to guide Timothy in the high and dangerous work of ordaining pastors for the flock of Christ. But we need not dwell on the context in which we read them; for they enunciate a great law in God's kingdom, and describe an awful fact in the administration of His perfect justice. Some men are open and proclaimed sinners. They stand in the face of the Church, and in the sight of God, self-accused, condemned, and branded. Their sins go before them as heralds, apparitors, and witnesses, carrying the whole history of guilt, with all its circumstance and evidence, before the judgment-seat of Christ.

The whole life of an open sinner is the judicial procession of a high criminal to the bar. It has the pomp and solemnity of death about it. The Church casts him forth from her altars and from her tribunals. Judgment issues against him by a common instinct. Even before the sentence of formal excommunication, he is visibly cut off from the mystical body of the Lord Jesus. And what is bound on earth is bound in heaven. It is the forerunner and visible symbol of the last great award. Such were the sins of apostates and of presumptuous sinners in the flesh or spirit, and of the authors of heresies and schisms. The whole history of the Church is marked by a line of open and barefaced offenders, who have lifted up their heel against the Lord, and crucified Him afresh unto themselves. In the great conflict of good and evil, they seem to bear a special office; so that the manifestation of sin is one of the collateral mysteries of the regeneration and perfection of saints.

Moreover, we see it at this day. The visible Church holds still within its outward pale thousands whose lives are their own condemnation: as in Philippi, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ." These are they whose "sins are open beforehand;" they need

no penetrating scrutiny, no process of conviction. Their sins go before to judgment; sent forward to prepare a place on the left hand of the Judge in that great day.

"And some men they follow after." That is to say, there are men all fair without, but within full of disguised and deadly evil. Though in their life they be never put to shame, yet in the sight of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, they are haunted and beset with guilt. Secret lusts, long cherished, often indulged, stealthily ventured upon; deep subtil intentions, pursued under a cloak of some high profession; positive and completed sins, so mixed up with the actings of common life as to escape detection. But it does not apply only to these grosser forms of sin. There are men who pass for faithful Christians, who have free access to the sanctities of the Church; to its offices of worship, its sacraments and benedictions. They mix in the fellowship of the devout and penitent; they kneel at the altar; they join in acts of highest communion. They seem fair and blameless; there is no brand, not so much as a spot visible upon them. To our eyes they are not "far from the kingdom of God." As they grow old, they grow in reputation. They die in honour, and are in high esteem among the faithful. They go to meet their Judge; but

their sins "follow after." All through life there has followed them unseen a throng of sins, concealed, unrepented, or forgotten. The sins of childhood, boyhood, youth, and manhood, follow on, gathering in number, guilt, intensity; every age bringing in its measure of characteristic sins; every year its transgressions, every day its provocation;—sins of deed and thought, of desire and imagination, of casual self-indulgence and habitual neglect; sins against conscience and light, against pleadings of grace, and stirrings of the Spirit; breaches of resolutions; contradictions of solemn confessions before God; relapses after partial repentance; all these mounting up, till from their bulk they spread beyond the field of sight, and from their magnitude become invisible. This, perhaps, may seem to be an extreme case. Would to God it were so. Will it be believed that this is no uncommon instance, not only in people who live without God in the world, but also in those whose character is in many ways religious?

Every one confesses it to be true of hypocrites or clandestine sinners; but we are now speaking of higher and more hopeful cases. What I have described will, on being analysed, be found to be more or less the case of multitudes. For instance, this is really the state of thousands who have never suspected the possibility of their being

in such a condition. They have fallen into it, because they never suspected it to be possible. There is nothing we are more apt to take for granted, than the theory of our acceptance before God. It is disagreeable to think ill of ourselves; we are conscious of good intentions; we feel to desire the highest and holiest state; sin is both fearful and painful to us; after sinning, we cannot be easy so long as we remember it; our conscience as well as our pride is hurt; and we comfort ourselves as soon as we can, by thoughts of repentance, and by turning to the better side of our character. In this way people get into a habit of consoling themselves. They shrink from sterner and deeper truths; shun all high standards; keep aloof from the light; and never suspect—as, indeed, how can they?—the existence of the evil of which they are unconscious. They believe themselves to be, what they know they desire. What they are able to discern, they take to be their whole state before God. Although at times particular faults distress them, yet their habitual consciousness is of the favourable interpretation which men put upon their outward life. What they are in God's sight they have never suspected, because they have no standard to ascertain, no tests to detect it.

Or, to take another example. This is also

the state of those who have never, since they came to the full power of reflection, made a real examination of their past life. The sins of our early years are but imperfectly perceived at the time. It is only by retrospect, and in the fuller light of a matured conscience, that their true character is duly estimated. The sinfulness of sin consists not only in the specific evil of each particular act, but in the whole of our case before God; in our relation to Him, His holiness, compassion, and long-suffering; in His dealings with us, and our ingratitude, coldness, insensibility, in return. Truly to know what we are before God, we must take our whole life, with its context, and read it in the light of God's love and providential care. Guilt is a complex thing; a balance of many particulars on God's part and on ours. It is our sins multiplied by His mercies; our transgressions by His gifts of light and grace.

As another example, we may take those who live without daily self-examination. It is impossible for such persons to escape self-deception. They become simply and sincerely ignorant of themselves. It is perfectly impossible to carry in mind the long unbalanced, unexamined account of many years, or even of one year alone. It is true in every thing, that neglect in detail is confusion in the whole. Sins that are not noted at the

time, slip out of sight; they pass behind each other. Sins rise upon one another, and become foreshortened, so as to hide all but the last of the whole chain. A lesser sin which is nearer will hide ten greater if they be farther off; a thousand will lie hid behind one. The whole retrospect of a life becomes narrowed and shut up into the recollection of a few months or days. All that is past goes for nothing; it is as if it did not exist. Good were it if it were really so before God; if our forgetfulness could blot the book of His remembrance; if what we cease to remember were forgotten before the Judge of quick and dead.

Now, of all such as these St. Paul says that their sins "*follow after*." Let us see what this means.

1. It means, that all sins have their proper chastisement; which, however long delayed and seemingly averted, will, as a general law, sooner or later, overtake the sinner.

I say *all* sins, because chastisement follows often even upon sins that are repented of, as in the case of David; and I say also as a *general* law, because it seems sometimes that God, in His tender compassion to individual cases, does hold back the chastisement of His rod, and by ways of peculiar lovingkindness make perfect the humiliation of particular penitents. It is certain that

there are such exceptions. No doubt they have their portion of the cross in other and inscrutable ways, which make the scales weigh even. In them the cross does the work of the rod.

Nevertheless, these exceptions no more break the general rule, than the translation of Enoch and Elijah repeals the sentence of death on sin. Our sins follow us by the rod of chastisement. As the sins of the fathers upon the children, so the sins of childhood on youth, and youth on after years. How little did we know what we were laying up for ourselves. How little did we think at that day, in the hour of our transgression: This will find me out when I am in middle life, or in my old age: though it tarry never so long, it will come at last. And how few, when they are visited, lay it to heart, and say: This sorrow or this sickness is the just chastisement following upon the sins of my life past. These are the scourges of God, which have followed me afar off, and now have overtaken me. "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth."[1]

2. Again, past sins follow after sinners in the active power by which they still keep a hold on their present state of heart.

It is one of the worst effects of sin, that, after

[1] Job xiii. 26.

commission, it clings to the soul. Every sin leaves some deposit in the spiritual nature. It quickens the original root of evil; it multiplies and unfolds its manifold corruption. And worst of all, it brings on a deadness and an insensibility of the spiritual nature. The most dangerous part of sin is its deceitfulness. Sin can hide itself from the conscience. It is most concealed at its highest pitch of strength. When at the worst, it is least perceived. Deadly sins, like mortifying wounds, have little sensible pain. The cause of most besetting sins, and of most sinful inclinations in after life is the indulgence of particular sins in youth or childhood. Pride, vanity, selfishness, contempt, wrath, envy, scornfulness, and other baser sins, are the consequences, or the following of early transgressions. They follow us in their moral deterioration. It is so also with the coldness, insensibility, indevotion, of which people complain. Some sin unrepented or forgotten, and because forgotten, therefore unrepented, lies festering in the dark; and the whole character suffers in all its parts and powers. It is this that obstructs the whole spiritual life; thrusts itself between the soul and the presence of God; bars up the avenues of grace; turns the bread of life into a stone; makes the true vine seem to be a dead branch; and the communion of Christ's saints to be cold

and desolate. It is cold to us, and we think it cold in itself. Fire has no heat to the dead. Christ did no mighty works among the unbelieving. Our early sins of wilfulness, irreverence, self-worship, have followed us. As shadows they fall upon our path, and darken our hearts, though the light about us "be sevenfold as the light of seven days." Temptations cast us down, because within us they have somewhat that is in secret league with them. The world overawes us, because, in times past, we have wondered after it and worshipped it. Our present falls, infirmities, spiritual struggles, afflictions, and dangerous inclinations, are for the most part the sins of our past life, following us in chastisement, and cleaving as diseases and temptations.

3. And further, whether or no sins follow in chastisement now, they will surely overtake us in the judgment. "Be sure your sin will find you out."[1] This is the inflexible destiny of sinners. Secret as they may be in this life, all shall be laid open before men and angels in the great account. Hidden things shall come forth to confound the hypocrite, despised sins to condemn the impenitent. The long quest of sin pursuing the guilty shall be ended before the great white throne. All masks shall be torn off from all faces there; and we shall be seen not as we shew ourselves, but as we are.

[1] Numbers xxxii. 23.

It will be a fearful meeting between a sinner and his very self; when his true self shall confront his false; and the multitude of his sins shall clamour on every side. Such must one day be the doom of the most successful hypocrite, of the fairest and least-suspected sinner.

So likewise with the self-ignorant, neglectful, self-deceiving. Sins they have so forgotten as never truly to repent of, shall be then gathered in array. This is the chief danger of spiritual sloth. Slothful Christians never really grapple with their sins. They take refuge in the generalities of confession, and in set forms of prayer. All their faults may be softened, but no one temper is really mortified. The moral deterioration of past sin they acquiesce in as inevitable, and believe to be beyond all cure in this life, trusting that God will somehow cleanse them. Their whole inward being is entangled and clouded; no convictions are fully formed, no truths fully recognised; they are neither cold nor hot, neither holy nor unholy, penitent nor impenitent; but in that fearful middle state for which judgment and eternity have no middle doom.

Who can say what is the burden of sin which rests upon the forgetful, negligent, complacent, unexamined, unsifted soul? What a crowd of forgotten sins shall follow the unconscious Christian

to the judgment! The great mass of Christians are neither saintly, nor deliberately sinful: and in that mass how much insensibility, how much false confidence, how much self-deceit! "Ephraim hath grey hairs upon him, and he knoweth it not."[1] "Wo to them that are at ease in Zion."[2] "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." Some men go down unawakened to the grave, and "their bones are full of the sin of their youth, which shall lie down with them in the dust."[3]

What sign, then, have we to shew that our sins are not following close upon us until now?

There are only two conditions on which we can be set free from this fearful pursuit of sin.

Either that we have never fallen from our filial obedience, since God, in holy baptism, made us to be His children; or that having fallen, we have, by a conscious and sincere repentance, arisen and cast ourselves at the foot of the Cross. Who is there that will say, that since baptism he has not fallen? If there be any, blessed and holy are they—sons of the first resurrection, on them the second death hath no power, neither, if they persevere, ever shall have.

But where are they? Then, if we cannot bear this witness, can we say that we have, by a de-

[1] Hosea vii. 9. [2] Amos vi. 1. [3] Job xx. 11.

liberate course of self-examination and confession, entered upon a life of repentance?

It was in mercy, for the sake of those who after baptism fell into deadly sin, that our Lord Jesus Christ left in His Church the power of absolution.

1. The first great end of this power was, openly to restore to peace both with God and the Church, those who had fallen from the peace openly and publicly given to them in their regeneration. And this the Church of England every year declares in the Commination service. Nor do we declare it only, but openly testify our desire that it may, for the health of souls, be restored.

This power of spiritual discipline entrusted to the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ, is inalienable. However bound down by worldly bonds, and entangled by the course of our secular state, so as to be for a time suspended from activity, there must ever exist an imperishable power of judging and chastening sinners now in this life, that their souls "may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." It is indeed much to be desired that this godly discipline of repentance were restored. Thousands who, in days of ruder but more living faith, would have been chastened into penitents, now hide the corruptions which fester inwardly, and die in their sins. It is the flock that perishes when the shepherd's

staff is broken. In this luxurious and unchastened land, it is to be feared that multitudes "lie in the hell like sheep," and "death gnaweth upon them," for lack of the loving severity and the stern tenderness of discipline.

2. But though the first end of this power of absolution be the public reconciliation of penitents, yet there is another equally important, equally, nay even, if possible, more blessed, and full of Divine compassion upon fallen Christians; and that is the private absolution to which the Church, in the name of Christ, invites all who cannot quiet their own conscience before God. The unbelief and impenitence of the world may suspend outward discipline, but the inward consolations of repenting Christians are beyond its reach. It cannot thrust itself between penitent souls and the pastor who bears the heavenly keys.

In days when there was more power in faith, more fire in love, more abasement in repentance, many of us who pass to and fro unchastened would have earnestly prayed to receive the yoke of a salutary penance. How do you know but that your sins may be following you now? Many are hemmed in by them, and know it not. Guilt hangs upon them, and they are not aware. Forgotten sins, though slow, are sure of foot. How have you assured yourselves that the sins of childhood, and

youth, or of your more self-possessed and daring manhood, are put away? They do not trouble you. But security is no sign of safety. Your conscience is not burdened. But that does not shew that they are taken away. Forgotten sins cannot burden us. Sins dimly seen in the twilight of a dull heart give little trouble. Insensibility is proof against disquiet: unconsciousness leaves no room for compunction. To be free from alarm is no sign of true repentance. There must be surer signs than these. It may be you will desire upon a deathbed, or in the foresight of death approaching, something more than your own self-absolution, to assure you that there is no train of sins still following you to judgment. Are you so sure that you can make no mistake in this? And what if you be mistaken? What if, at your passing hour, you wake up under the flood of eternal light, and see yourself all soiled and spotted with forgotten unrepented sins? We can make this mistake but once: and what a doom hangs upon that once! O better ten thousandfold is all humiliation, all bitterness, all shame, a whole life of penance, a whole age of sorrow in this present time, than to run into so much as a shadow of peril, lest death should first reveal to us this one eternal mistake. How far wiser in their generation are the children of this world! Who dresses his own wounds, or plays the physician to his own

fevered pulses? Who is his own pleader in a charge of life or death? Who counsels himself even in the vilest matters? And yet for the healing of the soul and for the judgment after death, we are all supremely skilled. Alas for us! If a mistake can be our ruin, here is one upon the threshold; a mistake fraught with eternal perils; the forerunner, it may be, of that mistake which is everlasting. It is in pity and tenderness to our infirmities of ignorance and fear, that our Lord Jesus Christ has committed to His pastors the keys of His heavenly kingdom. He has, by the Spirit, given His pastors[1] to the Church, that they may be the guides of sinners, and safeguards against self-deceit. It is a benign and loving appointment of the Good Shepherd: for after He has marked us for His own, we may still perish by our own self-guidance. Happy are they who from early childhood have been under a pastor's care; who have been thereby restrained from the blind and deadly wanderings of sin. What makes men so unwilling to accuse themselves before God, in the hearing of His servants, but that long years of self-guidance, or rather of self-deceit, have heaped up a multitude of sins before which their hearts die away for fear and shame? The longer they keep silence, the harder it will be to speak at

[1] Ephes. iv. 11.

last. Happy they whom early guidance has kept from the shame by keeping them from sin. But happy only in the next degree are they to whom God in His love gives grace to break the proud or trembling silence of their hearts by a full confession.

Now what are the pleas that people make for keeping aloof from this office of mercy? They are only two. One is to say, "My conscience is not burdened." But how do you know that your conscience ought not to be burdened? Are you the best, the most discerning, the most impartial judge? May not this very feeling be your one eternal mistake?

The other plea is, "I repent, and all sins are forgiven to a penitent." Yes, but this touches the very quick. Are you so sure that you do repent? Is it so easy to be a penitent, that you can forego the office of grace especially ordained for penitents? Are you so sure that your repentance is not the repentance of fear, that it is perfect in its extent, that it is fervent in its spirit; that it is the sorrow of pure love; that you have made due restitution in kind and in measure; that your confessions are without extenuations, and your self-examination without self-deceit? Are you sure of all this? Then you have one great reason to mistrust yourself; I mean, because you are so sure.

If you were less satisfied, you might be surer; because you are so sure, you have most reason for misgiving. Why leave any room for danger in a risk so great? Make all doubly sure. Ask of God grace to know yourself, and to lay yourself open with a full and true confession. Make the revelation of your sin, which, after all, must come upon the unwilling at the last day, to be now your free and penitential choice. Anticipate a shadow of the confusion which must cover all faces, when al hidden things shall be brought to light before men and angels. Let us not deceive ourselves. Because we are not open sinners, let us not be too secure. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after," stealthily and surely, like shadows, cleaving to the whole man—turning as we turn—dwelling where we abide—mysterious and inseparable.

Let us never believe ourselves to be secure, till we have washed the Feet that were wounded for us, with the tears of a living, purifying sorrow. Let us make haste to accuse ourselves at the foot of the Cross. Thither our sins cannot follow us. There only can we be safe from their pursuit. But let us not cheat ourselves by an imaginary conversion, or by a mock repentance. If you touch the Cross, it will leave its mark upon you.

If you bear no print of the Cross, be sure that you have never touched it yet. Sorrow, humility, self-denial, a tender conscience, a spirit of love, these are "the marks of the Lord Jesus," the prints of the nails, and the pledges of our pardon. Slack not your repentance, till you have made these your own.

SERMON VI.

SELF-DECEIT.

PROVERBS xxviii. 26.

"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

BY these words the inspired writer condemns the folly of those who take counsel of no one but themselves. He means that whosoever trusts his own heart as his light, adviser, and guide, in the complex ways and actings of life, is a fool. Half the wisdom of the wise is in the choice of their advisers. Wise men discern wisdom in others, and call them to council: the wisest man is he who least trusts himself alone. He knows the difficulties of life and its intricacies, and gathers all the lights he can, and casts them upon his own case. He must, in the end, act on his own responsibility; but he seeks all counsellors, the experienced, and impartial, sometimes the opposed and unfriendly,

that he may be aware on all sides; for "in the multitude of counsellors is safety."[1]

There is wisdom in the choice of advisers, as there is also folly. This is noted as the folly of Rehoboam, that he passed by the aged, and took the counsel of the younger.[2] Unwise men call in only those that will advise what they have already determined to do; that is, not to advise, but to supply pleas and excuses. This is a high pitch of folly; but the highest of all is, to have no counsellor; to take no advice; to act upon our own lights alone; to trust our own heart. This, Solomon says, is to be a "fool."

In all the action and probation of life, the chief and universal element in our responsibility is our own character. It enters into every thing; into every deed, word, and thought. Our whole life, both active and passive, even to its remotest relations with those about us, our judgments, inclinations, and opinions, will be what *we* are. Like an instrument out of tune, or a rule out of square, any imperfection and the particular measure of it will be perpetually reproduced. A biassed wheel, if it run a thousand years, will never run true. So it is with our hearts. Whatever be our resolutions, convictions, wishes, intentions, all will come out at last just as we are ourselves.

[1] Prov. xi. 14. [2] 1 Kings xii. 8.

Therefore we may take these words of the book of Proverbs for a warning to seek self-knowledge; and as a first step to self-knowledge, they bid us beware of trusting our own heart: or we shall but see ourselves, in a high moral sense, to be "fools," at last.

But it may be asked: Is not the heart God's creation and God's gift? Did He not plant eyes in it, and give to it light, and discernment to guide our ways? Is it not our truest personal guide, given, to each one of us, by God Himself? Why must a man who trusts his own heart be a fool? Let us see why this is said; and why Holy Scripture, that is, God Himself, denounces self-trust with such condemnation.

First, because our hearts, that is, we ourselves, are ignorant of ourselves. If we knew ourselves, we should not trust ourselves; we do so because we do not know what we are. We are by nature, and still more by personal act, sinners. And sin blinds the heart; so that the more sinful, the less it knows its sinfulness: for like death, which is most evidently perceived by the living, not at all by the dead, and by the dying only in the measure in which their living consciousness is still retained; so it is with sin dwelling in us. The dulness and coldness which brood upon a soul where the love of God is not, make it insensible to sin.

For what is sin? Is it not the rebellion of the will against the will of God? and the withdrawal of the creature from that service and end for which he was created? God made us for Himself, to love, serve, obey, and worship Him. This is our end, as much as the end or office of the sun is to give light by day. As long as creatures fulfil the end for which God made them, they conspire and meet in His presence and will; and so long they are full of light. They know themselves by knowing Him, and see themselves by seeing Him. He is the key of their being, the centre and interpretation of themselves. Such is the state of holy angels and of all spirits in heaven. And such was man before he fell. While he knew himself, he trusted in God; when he trusted himself, he became ignorant, and fell. And sin hid him from himself. He knew that he was naked; but he did not know that he had fallen from the end for which he had been created. And here is the great source of all sin, the chief productive spring of all evil upon the face of the earth. "Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind."[1] "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful: but became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was

[1] Rom. i. 28.

darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."[1] They became ignorant that God was the end for which they were made,—that He created man for Himself. This is the state of every man who is not converted to God by the Spirit; and they who are so converted, always mistrust themselves; for habitual self-mistrust abides with true conversion. But for the rest, who are either wholly or in part turned from God to themselves, they make to themselves a new end, for which they imagine that they were created; and that end, in some form or other, is self. It may be gross indulgence of self, as in sensuality; or it may be refined, as in spiritual pride; but gross or refined, it is all one. Their being does not terminate upon God, and centre in Him, but in and upon themselves; and therefore they can have no true knowledge of sin, not knowing the terms, so to speak, of their creation. Not to love God, not to serve God, not to obey God, is no perceptible sin to them: at most it is only a negative sin. Not to love, serve, and obey Him supremely is no sensible sin, so long as they do so in some measure. The proportions of their duty in relation to Him are lost. Again, where His will is but faintly perceived, how can they be conscious of their own high and direct variance

[1] Rom. i. 21, 22.

with it? In a contradiction there must be two opposites: where one is indistinct, the contradiction dies away. So, the less vividly they are conscious of God's will, the less they can feel the contradiction of theirs to His. Their whole interior being is confusion and darkness, in which law and order are lost. This is the state of our hearts by nature, and even after our regeneration, if we fall into habitual sin, until we are turned to God by the Spirit of holiness and of repentance. So long as we live either in sin, or in a slothful, indevout, though pure and amiable life, we can never really know for what we were created; what is the office of our wonderful and fearful nature; what are its capacities and powers, its relations and laws; and what, founded on all these, are our duties, and, therefore, our sins. How, then, shall any man but a fool trust his own heart? It is ignorant of its own constitution, its own end, its own destiny. Apart from God it is darkness and disorder; all its powers and emotions cross and mislead each other: so that at last we come to believe that each man is a world in himself, created for self-guidance, which ends in self-worship. This may sound harsh and overstated; and yet what, I would ask, is a proud man but a self-worshipper? and what is self-trust but self-guidance? What are ambitious, or worldly, or

covetous, or selfish people, but their own gods? Their chief love, will, and obedience, are given to themselves; and what but this is worship? Does this sound hard? So does all truth which is too stern to yield, and too real to compromise. Such being the state of all except those who, through a spirit of humiliation and self-abasement, mistrust their own hearts, what must we call them? what must we call the world—the lofty, splendid, overwhelming, gorgeous world—and all its million tribes of servants, followers, lovers, friends, and courteous observers? Do they, or do they not, know the end of their creation? If they do, how dare they revolt from it? If they do not, how can they know themselves? And who is there among them that does not trust his own heart, except when his money or his interest for this life is concerned? Where is the worldly man who, in matters of honour and dishonour, right and wrong, sin and duty, wisdom and folly, religion and faith, death and judgment, heaven and hell, does not with confident assurance trust his own heart? For these things, all are able, all are skilful, all are wise. To doubt it, is to impeach them in their loftiest capacity. The few who mistrust themselves in these things are in their eyes superstitious, slavish, unmanly. The world lives by self-trust, and each man keeps up

his fellow: nothing is so disturbing as the falling away of a bold companion. It is like a passing bell in the music of a feast; or a sudden death in the full tide of revelling. Such is the state of this fallen world, even of people baptized and outwardly Christian. A deep ignorance both of God and of self broods in secret on their souls: even pure, blameless, upright, benevolent men — many, too, who pass for devout, and in the habit of their life are outwardly observant of religion — come under this alarming sentence. In the sight of God we are told that they are "fools." And what is the sign? It is this: that in their judgment of God's will and service, of their own intentions and motives, of their own state and character, they trust their own heart.

Let us take another reason. Not only is the heart ignorant of itself, but it deceives itself. Of course these cannot be altogether separated. Every one who is ignorant is, in one sense, a self-deceiver; and yet it may not be with any laboured illusion. Ignorance is absence of light: self-deceivers have light, and visions in that light; but those visions are illusions. Ignorance is the danger of unawakened minds; self-deceit of the awakened. It is chiefly, though not exclusively, a religious temptation; and we are only concerned, at present, to regard it in the latter form.

As we have said, it is one of the miserable effects of the loss of love to God, that sins are not naturally hateful to us. We commit them readily, and alas, eagerly, from our childhood; with no sensible pain, but with a fearful delight. If we loved God, every sin, even in thought, would be as a drop of molten lead: it would sear and pierce us with anguish. But through our sinfulness it is to us as the droppings of the honeycomb. And as we early begin to sin, so we lose the little fear which, at first, came over us. We get to sin freely and easily, and to form a ready habit, which grows into a second nature, and passes into the unconscious emotions of our minds. What we have done from childhood, we grow even to believe to be right, or at least not wrong; to be venial, or to be indifferent; or what is more likely, by custom we lose the consciousness of what we do; and so go on unawares in things which make others tremble; and, if we could do them now for the first time, would make us stand aghast. So sins grow up, little by little, towering unseen to a great height, but hiding themselves from our hearts. What is more common than to see men characteristically marked by some one sin, which they pointedly censure in others, and from which they believe themselves to be absolutely free? It has almost become a proverb, that a man's besetting

sin is that one sin which every body knows but himself. We find this, of course, in its broader and grosser forms among worldly and indevout people; but it is equally, though more secretly, true of persons in the main religious. What is more common than to say, "How wonderful it is that such a person cannot see what every body else knows; that he should sincerely believe himself to be not so much as tempted to faults which manifestly govern his whole mind?" These unsuspected sins are almost universally the faults of childhood and early youth, which have become habitual and unconscious: for instance, personal vanity, selfishness, a difficult and disputatious temper, impatience, resentment, unreality, and the like. And they who have these faults in them by long habit, generally excuse themselves by ascribing the same to others on whom they have inflicted them; as if the wind should chide the roughness of the sea for disturbing its repose, all the while believing itself to be at rest.

The same effect, which appears in casual temptations, is more dangerously produced in deliberate motives and lines of conduct. An early habit of personal vanity, or desire of wealth, sometimes unconsciously governs a person's whole life. All thought, labours, sacrifices, aims, calculations, are made, not with a present sense of vanity or

covetousness, but in a direction, along the whole course of which both these faults will be indulged: the aim of their whole life being just such as a vain and covetous mind would most desire to attain. And yet it may be that numberless secondary and contingent events may come in, to make such a line at least not unreasonable, and perhaps even a duty. But either way the besetting sin converts it to its own food and service. It feeds and serves itself of that which perhaps the providence of God has ordained for His own glory. The majority of people judge of such persons by the ordinary tests of life and of the world, and see nothing in them but what is straightforward; and they, of course, entirely believe the same themselves: but those who know them from within unravel the double fibre of their motives, and can clearly distinguish the seeming from the true thread which guides their whole life. The same also is true of worse passions, such as jealousy, envy, and resentment, which sometimes govern from a secret chamber, and unconsciously to the man himself, the career of a whole life.

Thus far I have spoken chiefly of the self-deceit we put upon ourselves in matters relating to this world and to our neighbour.—The gravest part still remains; I mean, the deceit we practise upon ourselves as to our state before God. The

same unconsciousness which conceals from us our habitual sins, such as anger, or envy, and the like, conceals also the impatience and stiffness of our will towards God, and our want of gratitude and love, our indevotion, and sluggishness in the spiritual life. All these, having been upon us from our earliest memory, have become our natural, and, if I may use the word, our normal state. We have never known any other; we have no perception of any higher spiritual condition even by way of idea, than either our own as it is, or by advancing in degree, as it may become. The want of such a standard makes us to be a standard to ourselves. We confess, indeed, that we are not perfect; that we have many weaknesses and many faults; but we think them little and superficial, attaching loosely to the surface of our character. And this want of a quick sense of sin makes us slow to note what we do amiss. It has all our life long deadened our present consciousness of having done wrong; so that one of the effects of this unconsciousness is, a ready habit of forgetting our sins from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to youth, from youth to age, from year to year, at last from day to day and hour to hour, until the insensibility becomes continuous, and is broken only by great falls; and even these are little appreciated. Such a heart becomes, at last, swathed

in its own self-trust; and we watch it as we do the rash motions of a man who walks blindfold, reeling in the midst of dangers, which might sometimes, for a moment, provoke our mirth, if it did not always excite alarm. Such self-deceivers comfort themselves with the belief of habitual good intentions, being unconscious of their past and present self; and so go on before God, approaching Him without fear, even within the precincts of His altar. I am not describing the character of a gross sinner; but of many who are outwardly pure and upright; even of some who have lived from childhood without great falls, in a life fair and unmarked, while spiritual faults of a high and perilous kind have grown up unperceived, and wrought themselves into the texture of their whole character. So that what they most believe themselves to be, is furthest from the truth, and what they least suspect, they really are. But no power of man can persuade them of this fact. Though all the world beside see it at a glance, they still trust their own heart.

This deceit is often not only not corrected, but very much aggravated by the growth of religious knowledge and religious practices. But this leads us to another cause, which must be taken by itself.

Another reason why to trust our own hearts is a note of folly, is because they flatter us.

Hitherto we have spoken of self-deceit as hiding from us our besetting faults. Self-flattery imposes upon us with the conceit of our own excellence. And this is specially the danger of such characters when they become affected by religion. The mature intellect is able to apprehend in outline, and with great fulness, the description of the spiritual life, and of the saintly character, which, under our common condition, it requires many years of devotion and discipline really to attain. By a sort of creative imagination, and a skill of poetry or oratory, people impress themselves, and others sometimes, with the belief that they are what they describe. High speculations, and the excitement of talking, carry minds upward into a height where they soar in religious fancies; broken only by the next slight temptation, or the next call to an irksome duty. But for this there is a ready provision. It is their unhappy lot, they think, being inwardly called to the contemplation of Mary, to be against their will entangled in the cares of Martha. In this way they dream on, investing themselves with fictitious characters; playing at saintliness, as children imitate their elders. Personal vanity, which in other characters takes the direction of ostentatious accomplishments, showy dress, egotistical conversation, or concealed invitation of flattery, secretly intoxicates itself, in

such people, by an imaginary participation in the mind of saints. We turn from it, perhaps, when it is thus nakedly expressed. But let us remember that to invest ourselves with any measure of sanctity which we do not possess, is a measure of the same self-flattery. It pleases our self-love. It soothes us. It allays the pain of thinking that we are sinners; that some of our past sins are hateful, many of our present faults shameful and odious. How long have we gone on persuading ourselves that we are meek, poor in spirit, makers of peace, merciful, patient, and the like, because we assent in desire and will to the Beatitudes, and would fain share in their benedictions! How long have we persuaded ourselves that we pray both often and enough, earnestly and with devotion; that we love God above all, and above all desire so to love Him; that our life is, on the whole, not unlike the great Example of humility; and that we know our own hearts better than any one can tell us! And yet, what does this last persuasion shew? Why are we so sensitive under a reproof? Why do we accuse ourselves freely of all faults but the one imputed? Why are we never guilty in the point suspected? Why do we wholly guide ourselves, and feel so great security in our own direction? but because we trust our own hearts. Out of this proceed our visions of devotion, our

imaginations of sanctity. It is a forge never cold, always at work, forming and fashioning devices, which please us by their fair and shapely forms, and flatter us, because they are a homage to ourselves.

Such is our heart; by nature blind, a deceiver, and a flatterer; always hiding its own face; shifting one motive for another, changing our intentions in the very moment of action, and our aim even when the wish is half accomplished; turning aside the reproofs of love, and filling us with soothing falsehoods; drawing a veil over sins past, and beguiling us with the thought of our present integrity; shrouding us in perfect ignorance of self, while it persuades us of our complete self-knowledge.

What a contrast before the Searcher of hearts was Mary the sinner and Simon the Pharisee! He was of no ill life, no sensual indulgence, no cherished, conscious sins: in his own eyes pure, upright, zealous, and devout; in the eyes of the Redeemer, thankless, loveless, self-deceived. "Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with

oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment."[1] And all this becomes seven-fold more dangerous when, as often happens, such people believe themselves to know their own hearts by the light of God's Spirit. The self-deceit then becomes intense. It is a part of their religion to believe that He has revealed their sin to them; a point of duty not to doubt that their view of themselves is the right one. Mere men of the world see through the delusion. The clear, strong, common sense of mankind is offended, not without just cause, at the proud and provoking unreality of religious self-deceit.

If this be so, if we be our own deceivers, what security shall we take against our own hearts? Out of many we can now take only two.

1. The greatest security against deceiving ourselves by trusting our own hearts, is a careful information of conscience. But this plainly runs beyond the period of our responsibility into the account of those to whom our childhood was subject. Early training is the fountain from which good or evil chiefly flows. The conscience of children is their first and highest faculty. Blessed, so far as outward aid can make him, is the child who is early taught to know the nature of sin, not only as a thing simply wrong or shameful, but as a

[1] St. Luke vii. 44-46.

stain on our Baptism, a grief to the Spirit of holiness, a fresh wound in Him who was crucified, and a rebellion of our will against the will of God. The knowledge of sin in its principle is necessary to explain the nature of our temptations, and of the sins of our hearts. From this one truth, steadily applied to ourselves, comes a knowledge of our real dangers and inclinations. God alone can tell from what evils, committed in ignorance both of sin and of ourselves, such an early information of the conscience would restrain us. A knowledge of sin in itself would interpret to us the true moral character of our own conduct, and all its intricate facts of thought, word, and deed. We might, indeed, still deceive ourselves; but it would be harder to do so. And this knowledge of ourselves, beginning when as yet there is little to be known, makes clear the field in which the growth and changes of character are to be observed. Our chief difficulty is in the attempt to analyse the confused and hardened mass of self, neglected for twenty, thirty, half a hundred years; to unravel a world of knots and entanglements; to find the beginning of the clue. It is almost impossible to do by retrospect what it is even easy to accomplish by continuous watchfulness, beginning in early years. Self-examination begun late in life must remand the chief part of

its discoveries to the day of judgment. It is a fearful thought that we may then remember, for the first time, sins of which we ought to have spent a life in repenting.

Another benefit of this early information of conscience is, that we should be preserved from the stunning and deadening insensibility which early sins bring upon us. There is, as we have seen, a sort of self-concealment, by which sin secretes itself the more invisibly while it becomes the more dominant in us. It would also be impossible for a conscience, early enlightened as to the nature of sin, to deceive itself with imaginations which, springing only from fancy and self-love, are contradicted by all the discernments of the higher spiritual judgment. But all this is both so self-evident and so full of thoughts, that we can do no more than touch upon it. No words too strong can be found to urge on parents and guides of children to begin the information of the conscience as early as the information of the reason; and in doing so, not to content themselves with repetitions of texts and catechisms, but to proceed to clear and detailed explanations of the law of God, the nature of sin, and the office of conscience itself. And further, let them remember that, when they offered their children to God in holy Baptism, they thereby committed them to His pastors. Perhaps one of

the greatest evils of this day, most fruitful of sin, and fraught with peril to the soul, is the neglect of parents in not putting their children, one by one, from the age of responsibility, under the guidance of their pastors. Until this be done, there can be no sufficient instruction of the conscience; no extensive security against self-trust and self-deceit; and no adequate cure of the unknown spiritual diseases which begin in childhood, and cling to the soul, it may be, for ever.

2. The other security is the only one which remains to those who have never enjoyed the first; and that is, to take the judgment of some other person, instead of trusting in themselves. It will be, no doubt, painful and distressing; it will bring shame and burning of face. But is not the stake worth the cast? And are we not in earnest to be saved? It is of little use, indeed, to advise people who are not in earnest. Let us speak only to such as know the weight of sin, the worth of one soul, the difficulty of the narrow path, the horror of the second death. If we would really know ourselves, we must begin by taking for granted that we are most likely to be deceived in our own case. We advise others better than ourselves; so would they us again. It is a proverb as wide as the world, that a man is not to be trusted in a case where he is a party. And when are we more of partisans

than in judging of our own character? However truly the needle may commonly point in the open sea, there are stations where allowance must be made; that is, it can be no longer trusted. So it is with our sincerest intentions. We acknowledge it in matters of this world's honour and wealth: but there is no subject in which we are so unworthy of trust as in judging of our faults; partly because a misjudgment involves no present loss, and partly because self-love outweighs the whole weight of the soul. We may, indeed, take it as a test of sincerity and of reality, and all but assure ourselves, that a man who sticks to his own view of himself against the judgment of others, is either not in earnest, or, in the grave and divine sense of Holy Writ, "a fool;" that is, rash, blind, and self-deceiving. How little do we lay to heart, who he is that would fain stop our ears against all advisers. And the man who takes counsel of nobody is his easy prey. What a spectacle is a self-trusting heart in the sight of holy angels—of those whose eyes are open, and whose office of love it is to watch over us against the powers of darkness which hover on all sides, night and day. If in childhood we lost the blessing of guidance, let us not lose it now. We lost it then through no fault of ours; now the fault will be wholly our own. Let us do now what we shall

desire that we had done when we come to die. At that day, it may be, we shall say, "Would God I had trusted all the world rather than myself; even my enemies would have taught me self-knowledge; from what sins and faults should I have been preserved; from what thoughts which haunt me now; from what fears which appal me; from what hindrances which slacken my repentance, and beat back my prayers. I see now what I might have seen from the beginning. I was warned, but I did not believe. I was lovingly withstood, but I would not be persuaded. Now all is too clear. God grant it be not all too late."

SERMON VII.

THE FREEDOM OF THE REGENERATE WILL.

ROMANS viii. 19-21.

"The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same, in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

IN these words St. Paul is contrasting the state of the unregenerate world with the state of the Church, which is born again through the Spirit of Christ. By 'the creature,' he intends the whole creation of God—the entire work of the six great days. He speaks of it as of one living and manifold person, stretching forth its head and its hands for deliverance from some oppressive burden, straining its sight in earnest longing for some great revelation of God. By this he means the silent

anguish, as it were, of the whole inanimate earth, and the universal sorrows of mankind under the dominion of the fall. For the whole creation of God was brought into bondage to corruption, that is, to sin and death, not by its own act and will, but by the first father of all, in whom all fell. And yet not without a hope even from the beginning; because through the seed of the woman there was promised a redemption, by which the creation of God should be once more restored to freedom and to glory.

But though St. Paul speaks inclusively of the whole creation, even of the lower animals and of the world of nature, on which the tokens of the fall have manifestly passed, he speaks emphatically of mankind, and chiefly of the Gentiles.

By the bondage of corruption, he means the kingdom of Satan, which weighed upon every living soul—the mighty and ever multiplying tradition of sin, which for four thousand years had been gathering and growing in breadth and intensity over the face of the whole earth; the lineal and accumulated inheritance of personal and national wickedness, quickened by lusts, idolatry, sensual philosophies, atheism, tyranny, and bloodshed; towering to its height in the great empire of Rome; which embodied, as it were, in one visible form, the kingdom of death; the death both of

body and of soul, in this world and in the world beyond the grave.

And yet in all this misery and anguish there was an inextinguishable consciousness of a holier origin and of a higher destiny. The Gentile world was conscious of its own debasement; and by ten thousand voices, uttered a lamentation, a kind of dim prophecy of its own deliverance. It had still enough of spiritual life to sorrow and to yearn after purity and the revelation of God. By its very expectation, it prophesied of the day when the feet of Evangelists should bring glad tidings of good upon the dark mountains. The call of the Gentiles, which the Church of Israel foretold by inspiration, the nations of the earth prophesied by earnest waiting and desire. There were spiritual attractions drawing together as the fulness of time came on, preparing the hearts of God's elect for the gift of eternal life.

And this leads to the true meaning of the words, "the manifestation of the sons of God," and "the glorious liberty of the children of God." They mean the state of the regenerate, on whom was shed abroad the spirit of adoption; that is, the members of Christ's mystical body, who were taken out of the dead world, and grafted into the living Church; over whom sin and death had no power of condemnation. In many places of the

New Testament, the great grace of the Gospel is declared to be the adoption; that is, the grace and state of sonship. As in this chapter, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."[1]

So again St. Paul says to the Galatians, "When we were children (that is, in spiritual life), we were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."[2] Again, to take only one more of many passages: St. John says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what

[1] Rom. viii. 14-16. [2] Gal. iv. 3-7.

we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."[1] In all these places we are taught, that we are now the sons of God; and that there is, in virtue of our sonship, an inheritance, a fuller manifestation of grace, yet to come. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ." "We know not what we shall be." "We shall be like Him." And this exactly interprets the words of St. Paul in this place. He speaks of the yearning of the creation of God, and of the Gentile world, for "the manifestation of the sons of God;" and then he adds, "and not only they, but ourselves also, which have received the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." They yearn to be like us; we, to be "like the angels of God." Though we are manifested as His sons, we are not yet made perfect: though in our spiritual life we have been "delivered from the bondage of corruption," yet in the body we must still die; we must wait for the resurrection, when He shall make the body of our humiliation like to the body of His glory.[2] And this explains also the meaning of the word 'regeneration,' which St. Paul uses of Baptism. It is the grace of the new Birth, "the laver of rege-

[1] 1 St. John iii. 1, 2. [2] Phil. iii. 21.

neration," the being "born of water and of the Spirit." By our blessed Lord it is used also of the resurrection, when the work of regeneration shall be made perfect by the redemption of the body. "Ye that have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel:"[1] for our salvation is all one work, beginning at our baptism here, and carried on to the day of the resurrection, when all shall be made like Him, by the vision of Himself.

The plain meaning, then, of the text is, that the whole world, conscious of its disinheritance, is crying aloud for the spirit of adoption, which is even now about to be shed abroad. The nations are teeming with gifts of secret grace which shall be gathered and compacted, by the power of a new birth, into the mystical body of Christ: they are waiting and breaking forth in impatient desire for the message of life, which the Father gave to His Son, and His Son hath given unto us. Out of that dark waste shall spring up sons and saints of God. "He will destroy the face of the covering, and the vail that is spread over all nations;" and the powers of the regeneration and of the resurrection shall work throughout

[1] St. Matt. xix. 28.

mankind, casting forth the first and the second death, and healing the wounds of all creatures. Upon us who have been called this work is already begun. We are united to the Son of God, and are made partakers of His life, death, and resurrection. All that He has accomplished in His own Person is made ours by the free gift of God. The whole Church in the world is a new creation, rising up out of the old: sin and death, that is, the gates of hell, cannot prevail against it. The powers of the fall are turned back again upon their original source: against the Church of Christ they have no power. It is the justified body of a righteous Head; the immortal brotherhood of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. We are "no more servants, but sons;"[1] no more in bondage, but "in the glorious liberty of the children of God." Such is our state as Christians.

From this we learn, that the great gift of the Gospel in our regeneration is spiritual liberty, that is, the true freedom of the will.

God made man with a will perfectly free; a part of His own image. Man by sin enslaved it to sin, and yet so as to be always a free agent even in sin. Therefore in many passages of Scripture the contrast of the state of nature, and even of

[1] Gal. iv. 7.

the Jews, with that of Christians, is an opposition of *bondage* and *liberty:* as in this place, between "the bondage of corruption," and "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Speaking to the Jews, our Lord said, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."[1] St. James calls the Gospel "the law of liberty;" and says, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."[2] St. Paul says, "The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane:"[3] meaning, that they who are born again by the Spirit of Christ are no longer under the dominion of ignorance and lust, as the Gentiles; nor under ceremonies and commandments written on stone, as the Jews: they are gifted with the light and strength of the Spirit of God, and their law is not a law without them, but within, not on tables of stone, but in the heart and in the soul. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."[4] Their law is the Spirit in a regenerate conscience; they are a law unto themselves. When St. Paul, therefore, says, "the law is not made

[1] St. John viii. 36. [2] St. James ii. 12.
[3] 1 Tim. i. 9. [4] Heb. x. 16.

for a righteous man," it is in the sense of saying, the first axioms of science, the first rules of art, are not for the wise and skilful. Such guides are not for them, as the conscious and perceptible rules of their practice. Yet they may not contravene the very least of them. The most cultivated reason must obey the elementary laws of scientific truth as exactly as the rudest. They are a rule to all; only the learned do not lean upon them consciously. Such principles of truth have passed into their very nature, and have become spontaneous. So it is with the law of obedience in those that are faithful to their regeneration. They have received again the beginnings of the grace which in Adam was perfect; the impress of the image of God who is law to all things, even to Himself.

From this we may draw some practical lessons of great importance for the guidance of our life.

1. First, how deep a degradation sin is,—above all, in the regenerate. The hatefulness of sin is hardly more appalling than its shame. It makes man, who is but little lower than the angels, to be the slave of corruption, like the beasts that perish. We hear much of the dignity of human nature; and truly a dignity there was when God made mankind in His own image and likeness: but in man as fallen, it is but the dream of a

degraded lineage, of a kingly race thrust from its dominion; a mere mockery of its utter nakedness. "By whatsoever a man is overcome, by the same is he brought in bondage." A wilful sinner is as a slave over whom a barter has been concluded. The money has been weighed for him; he is sold under sin; a mere tool, all the more degraded because a willing tool; worshipping the master that destroys and spurns him. By the abuse of his free will, he becomes the slave not only of the world and of the devil, but of his own corruption, of his own flesh, and of his own tyrannous passions, which, each one, gain a sort of outward personality, and usurp a despotism over the sordid and sensual will, degrading him, and, in every several act, making the degradation intense, because it is freely chosen and willingly endured. Such is every habit of vice, even in the heathen. But how much worse in those that have been born again, who, of sons of God, make themselves again "twofold more the children of hell than" before—who, out of the glorious liberty of the children of God, sell themselves to the bondage of lust, pride, revenge, and the like. Every such vice is a taskmaster, standing with a lash over his miserable servant. No one that has given himself up to such a bondage can call himself his own. He has lost all title and property in himself; he is both

possessed and used, and made away with, by another, and always with his own obsequious consent. So false and contradictory is sin. When we seek liberty in license, we become "fast bound in misery and iron." There is no slavery so great as that of a will which has broken the yoke of Christ, and become, by its own free choice, the servant of its own sinful inclinations; for the will itself is in bondage to its own lusts. So sinners enslave each other. "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption." The most slavish will is that which sins with the greatest freedom. We must not limit this to grosser vices: far from it. The smoother and more refined sins are all in this point alike. Ambition, personal vanity, jealous tempers, an evil eye, love of money, worldly pleasures, luxury, indolence, insincerity, and many like faults, which are for the most part concealed, and very subtil. Sometimes they appear under forms that the world admires; and become, every one, masters to whom we abandon "the glorious liberty of the children of God." There is somewhat very melancholy in the abject and eager servility with which men obey their hard commands; sacrificing health, peace, freshness of heart, conscience, the light of God's presence, the very soul of their spiritual life. They enter again insensibly into the

bondage of corruption, and groan under the burden which weighs on them more heavily day by day. Where is, I will not ask "the glorious liberty of the sons of God," but the dignity of human nature, in a vain or vicious Christian? We must be sons or slaves. Choose which you will be. As you live so you choose. Some men make their profession a bondage. They toil for a fortune, or a name, or to make a family, and leave a title behind them, as if they were created for no other end; as if in that their will had found its true place and sphere of responsibility. Others make an abject slavery of a life of pleasure, under which they are perpetually complaining, and yet perpetually entangling themselves deeper. What is worldly society but a thraldom, in which almost every one feels himself both burdened and galled by unmeaning customs, by heartless usages, which break in upon the order, the peace, and the sanctity of a devout life? Nevertheless, people still go on, professing reluctance and unwillingness at every step, longing to be free, and yet willingly offering themselves to be bound tenfold closer to the wheel which carries them in the endless track of a worldly life. Miserable struggles, all in vain. In this way some go on through life, and lose at last the perception of their bondage; dream that they are free; wear their chains till they forget

them, or would be ill at ease if their shackles were struck off.

2. We may learn next, how great is the misery of an inconsistent life. It forfeits the true grace of Christian obedience. To be religious from mere sense of necessity, that is, against our will, is a contradiction and a yoke. To try to love God because we are afraid of Him, what can be more piteous? What more miserable than the reluctant, laggard unwillingness with which some people do what they call their religious duties? The longer they do them against the grain, the more irksome they become, and the more estranged their hearts will grow. And this must be so, until they have released their will from the bondage of worldly or personal temptations. So long as these keep hold on them, they are not, in the true and perfect sense, free agents. It is much to be feared that many whose lives are pure, who appear devout in all the outward usages of the Church, serve God with a heart that has no *pleasure* in obedience. If they would speak out plainly what they feel in secret, they would confess that to them God's commandments are "grievous," and the yoke of Christ is not "light." Their free will is given to another, and it is but a constrained homage they render to Christ. The glorious liberty of the children of God turns to a forced, necessary

observance of commandments. They are under a law, and have retrograded in the scale of spiritual perfection; from sons, they have turned back again to be servants; and their whole temper of heart towards God is infected by a consciousness of indevotion and of a lingering undutiful will.

This it is that makes the spiritual habits of the soul so weak, and the faults of the mind so strong. People grow dejected under a consciousness of difficulty, and become faint-hearted in temptations; and faults come back upon them and regain ascendancy. Such people come at last to say, It is of no use; I have tried for years to find my happiness in religion, but nothing will do. It is all as irksome as ever. I feel no pleasure in any thing holy; and the thought of God alarms me. Now what is the true cause of all this? "Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck."[1] It is because we do not realise the blessedness and the power of a free will; because we will not do God's will as sons, out of a loving and glad obedience, therefore we cannot stand

[1] Deut. xxviii. 47, 48.

against the world. It takes us captive, and puts out our eyes, and sets us blinded to the mill, to labour in darkness, in an involuntary and shameful servitude.

3. And once more: we may see how great is the happiness and the dignity of a formed and mature faith. For what is faith but the realisation and actual enjoyment of the glorious liberty of a free and holy will, supported by the unseen world, by the presence of God, and by the Spirit of the Father and of the Son? It is through this deep consciousness of what their spiritual birth had made them, that saintly men in all ages have been strengthened to break through the manifold bondage of sin and the world, of this fallen life, and, harder still, of their own self-indulgent hearts. It is by this that they have conceived and accomplished all great works of mercy, all great sacrifices of self. They cleared away the space around their lot in the world, and laid down the lines and principles of their life upon the scale of that "liberty with which Christ has made us free." Without either affected singularity or needless contradiction to other people, —tokens always of a weak and little mind,—there has ever been a clear and distinguishable character about every such man; a character altogether his own, standing out plain, harmonious, and in-

telligible. This is the true development of our new birth; the true secret of all strength and force in the individual will; the several and distinct personality of the members of the mystical body of Christ. Such a man is His freeman. The world has no jurisdiction over him: public opinion, the maxims and example of others, the traditions of centuries and of nations, have no hold upon him; he pays them no allegiance. The baits and lures of ambition, wealth, pleasure, flattery, popularity, have no seduction for his will. It stands alone in the centre of his own soul, stayed only upon God. No external forces seem to tell upon him. Personal infirmities disappear from the outline of his character: personal temptations cleave asunder and are passed through without perceptible exertion; they seem rather to melt away before him. Great sacrifices are the unstrained acts of his daily life. There is a perfect sameness about him at all times; all his ways of judging seem fixed and invariable; his very sympathies appear to be under laws that never change; they may be always foretold and acted on; his perceptions of right and wrong grow to be intuitive; and his words, from the sameness of his inward character, seem to follow by a certain order, and to recur by certain just and accurate combinations. Every thing appears to be

already weighed, and at once to find its place under some deliberate judgment. Such men are not more perfect in strength than in gentleness; in their exalted sanctity than in their entire self-abasement. They are servants of Him who was at once the Lord of all power and might, and also meek and lowly of heart.

What, after all, is this but the power of a will that is truly free, enfranchised by the glorious liberty of God's kingdom? And it is to be found not only in highly cultivated men, but in the most simple; not in the refined alone, but among the rudest. It is the inexhaustible fulness of the Spirit of Christ, issuing, through a will holy and free, and filling the whole spirit and soul of man. This is the true and only basis of all real Christian perfection; the universal foundation of all true sanctity. Under all variety of circumstances, this is the one true character of saints. It matters not what be the lot or labour of a man in life; he can build securely on nothing else; all other foundations will bear only partial and imperfect forms of obedience. The world may commend them as rational, moderate, and Christian; but the sanctity of apostles, prophets, martyrs, and saints, of all kindreds, and nations, and ages,—the full breadth of the life of the Spirit is built on this one law of grace alone:—they served God

with a will free and powerful, as sons adopted in the Spirit of the Son of God.

We see, then, our calling. Our only pattern is the life of our Lord: and by His spiritual grace we may be like Him if we will. Let us not weaken ourselves by taking a lower standard: for we shall come short enough through our own infirmity. Pray for His daily help, that you may strive and watch as long as you are conscious of any warp or bias which draws your will from the directness of its intention. If, by God's mercy, you are free from grosser vices, yet the world and the customs of life, the influence of your employment and your relaxations, the temper and dispositions which seem born in us, will make for you many temptations, and cast many fetters upon your will. It is a hard thing to be truly free; to have no master but One in heaven.

Remember, then, that as you are under the law of liberty, so by that law you must be judged. And that judgment will be not by the letter of the decalogue, nor by a scanty and measured rule; but by your gifts and blessings, by your opportunities and powers, by the grace of sonship, and the law of filial obedience. When you are tempted, say, "Shall I, the freeman of Christ, make myself the servant of the world? From a child shall I again become a slave?" It is only one stroke that is

needed to set us at large from most of our temptations. If we had faith to be bold, we should strike it, and go free.

But that you may be weaned from the world which fascinates your hearts, pray for the love of God; pray that He will shed abroad in your hearts a consciousness of His unspeakable love to you, and make you delight in His love as your supreme and exceeding joy. This will make all evil hateful to you: every thought and shadow of sin will fall with a sensible pain upon your conscience. The light and paltry things of the world will be tasteless and irksome. Even the dearest affections will be, not destroyed, God forbid, but taken up into a higher and more blissful love. Why is self-denial bitter, but because our hold on what we love is so tenacious? If we loved Him more, we should let these fall from us, that we might delight ourselves above all in God. Even the sharpness of the Cross would be sacred and sweet. Every act of a will which is like unto His will, Who, of His own free choice, "offered Himself without spot to God," would bring a sensible accession of happiness and peace. What do our heavy hearts prove but that other things are sweeter to us than His will; that we have not attained to the full mastery of our true freedom, the full perception of its power; that our sonship is still but faintly

realised, and its blessedness not yet proved and known? An active and ardent love of God would make all things easy both to do and suffer. Disappointment, pain, and affliction are hard to bear, because He has one will and we have another. We suffer, but not willingly; and this collision is the cause of all distress. Our consent would turn all our trials into obedience. By consenting we make them our own, and offer them with ourselves again to Him.

A little while, and the mystery of this disordered world will be accomplished: our deliverance will be fulfilled, and the number of the elect be full. Then shall all be made perfect. They who are waiting in the rest beyond the grave; they who shall be quick on earth at His coming; they and we, if we be faithful, shall be clothed upon with life—with a spiritual body, with the glory of the resurrection; and the whole creation shall be delivered from the bondage of the fall. There shall be no more travailing in pain; no more tokens of sin on the creatures of God; no more death. Every scar shall be smoothed out, and every soil cleansed away at His coming and His kingdom, when the new creation shall rise out of the old, and the morning stars shall sing together, and all the sons of God shall shout for joy.

SERMON VIII.

SLOWNESS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

PSALM cxix. 25.

"My soul cleaveth unto the dust."

THESE words express with great intensity of humiliation a consciousness which is universal among all sincere Christians. I mean, the power of the world and of the body over the soul. Such people desire to serve God with a free, growing, spiritual service; but they often feel impotent, slothful, and sluggish. They strive, but make no speed; toil, but make little way: they feel as if they were laden with a great weight, and that weight were powerfully attracted to the earth; and the earth clings to them, and they to it, as by a kindred nature. In all their sorrows, joys, thoughts, cares, hopes, labours of this world, they feel vivid, quick, and untiring; as a bark upon the sea, which, in all its wanderings and flights, is never weary: but in the service of God, in obedience, repentance, prayer,

love, worship, they move with a dull, heavy pace. They are conscious that earth has more part in them than heaven; for out of the dust were we taken, and dust we are. And so, says the Book of Wisdom, "the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth on many things."[1] The more they are awakened to the knowledge of God, the more they feel their tardiness of spirit. But this does not arise only from the sympathy, so to speak, between our nature and the dust, of which, in the beginning, we were made; for a sinless humanity would cleave not to the dust, but to God. It has a special token of the fall in it. The consummation of this fallen sympathy is the wages of sin, that is, death itself; "unto dust shalt thou return." The curse laid upon the serpent is a proof of this: "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life."[2] And this original curse is not taken off from him even in the redeemed world: when all creation shall have peace, yet still, as the Lord said by Isaiah, "dust shall be the serpent's meat;"[3] that is, humiliation and banishment from God. This slowness and slug-

[1] Wisdom ix. 15. [2] Gen. iii. 14. [3] Is. lxv. 25.

gishness, therefore, in spiritual obedience, is a special proof of the power of the fall still abiding upon us, and of our proneness to linger and hold fast by earth and its attractions. We will not, however, go into so large a subject as this opens, but take only one point in it; I mean, the slowness of spiritual growth, which is so great a humiliation and distress to sincere minds, or, as they believe and express it, the stubborn earthliness of their nature.

I do not mean to say, that this is not often a very just cause of distress and fear: for some people practise great deceits upon themselves, and, while they keep up a round of religious usages, really give themselves a full and unbridled range of earthly pursuits, enjoyments, aims, and thoughts. But we will not speak of them, nor of any who by their own inconsistency and indolence hinder the gracious inspirations and workings of God in their hearts. Let us take only the case of those who sincerely and faithfully endeavour to follow and comply with His grace in them; whose pure desire is to grow in the spiritual life; and whose chiefest and greatest distress is the consciousness of manifold hindrances, obstinate faults, want of religious affections, of earnestness, zeal, perseverance, delight in God, and the like; or, in one word, of the little advance they make in the life

of spiritual obedience. No words give fuller utterance to their complaint than these: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust."

1. One cause of this disheartening and saddening feeling is, that people aim at models and examples which are too high for them. It may be asked, How is this possible, when the standard set before us is the life of our Lord Himself, and He with His own mouth said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect?"[1] And again, St. John says, "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure;"[2] and "he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous."[3] What standard can be higher than this? and are we not, by Divine command, bidden to aim at it?

Now we must distinguish between the perfection of the great Example which it is our duty to imitate, and the proportions in which our actual lot, strength, and calling, admit of such an imitation. Clearly the example of our Lord would seem to exact of us, at once, to be no less than sinless. But no one so understands the precept of imitation. It lifts up a pattern, and it prescribes a tendency, which is to govern our whole life. But the measures and proportions in which that tendency may be realized are not only infinitely

[1] St. Matt. v. 48. [2] 1 St. John iii. 3. [3] Ib. 7.

various in detail, but are no less ordained and distributed of God than His gifts of grace. The apostles He called to the closest likeness to their Lord in holiness, love, suffering, toil for His elect, utter forsaking of the world, and even to an imitation of His passion: so also all martyrs, evangelists, and successors of the apostles, who have been called out of the world to convert it, and be spent for it: so all who have been specially called to lives of sanctity, to a full devotion of themselves, for life, to works of charity and mercy, to labours of spiritual learning, prayer, and repentance: and in like manner through all the manifold shades of the religious life, until we enter upon the confines of the world and its works, its powers and offices, households and homes. "Every man hath his proper gift of God: one after this manner, another after that." Every one has his vocation; and his vocation is of God. Our vocation is the measure of our powers, and fixes the proportions of our duty. This is the first thing to be tried and ascertained. When any are called wholly to forsake the world, their duty is plain. They are set to imitate the life of Christ with all their strength, and with all possible conformity of inward and outward circumstance. This applies chiefly and directly to pastors who are united to the Chief Shepherd in His work of love and self-

denial. It is true, also, of great multitudes who are, by God's loving tenderness, called to the peace and happiness of a devout life of prayer and mercy, sheltered from distraction. But the rest,—that is, the great body of the visible Church, with whom we have now to do,—are called to attain each one the fullest measure he can of the mind and spirit of Christ, under the proportions and conditions of his state. For instance, rulers, statesmen, ministers of human law, merchants, men of labour and action, of business and the arts of life, parents, husbands and wives, children still in subjection, servants, and the poor of Christ's flock—all these are limited and restrained by a multitude of necessities: they are perpetually under a "present distress;" and they must serve their state, and through their state serve God. This makes many things impossible to them, many things disproportioned to their vocation; and to such things they are therefore not called.

One remark is to be made on all this. There is one *example* for all, the life of Christ; one *tendency* wholly unlimited, in the direction of which all must press towards His example; but the standard, that is, the manner and measure in which we are permitted to advance in that tendency, is of God. He proportions it by His providence and His grace. All we can do, and the

holiest thing we can do, is to apply and mould ourselves entirely upon the lot He has meted out to us. For in so doing, it is impossible to say what Christians may not attain. There is a Divine mystery and paradox about our probation: so that some who are called to the lives of apostles may be lowest in the imitation of Christ; and some who are called to the service of the world are closest in their likeness to His perfection. The tendency, therefore, is the same in all; the grace and power of indefinite advance is offered to all; to decline it, or to use it slackly, to be wanting on our part in zeal and perseverance, is our sin. And yet, after all, there are mysteries of proportion and vocation, which flow from the fountain of all mystery, the election of God; thither we may trace them upward, but there we must stay our search, and worship Him in love and silence.

The practical rule, therefore, to be drawn from this is, that we ought to measure our actual lot, and to fulfil it; to be with all our strength that which our lot requires and allows. What is beyond it, is no calling of ours. How much peace, quiet, confidence, and strength, would people attain, if they would go by this plain rule. We read in the lives of great servants of God, how they fasted, prayed, and laboured; how many dangers they encountered, sought, and suffered;

how many works of love they fulfilled;—how many difficulties they overcame; and our heads are sometimes turned with a wish to do the like. Or, to bring this nearer home; we see persons called out from common duties and relations, gifted with aptitudes and powers, placed in the midst of ripe opportunities, devising and accomplishing works of charity, piety, and mercy; and we are moved with a desire to bid farewell to our homes, and disquieted with the thought that we are doing nothing, so long as we are not like them. We forget the parable of the talents, and Who it is that both distributes them and will take account. Now this is one very common and very needless cause of discomfort to sincere people; and perhaps chiefly to the most sincere, who, as they have a more earnest desire to advance, have also a quicker sympathy with higher and more devout examples. We may take, then, this comfort, that the standards or visible forms of the spiritual life are various, and are appointed to us by God Himself; and that the power of tending towards the perfect holiness of Christ is as full and unlimited to us in our commonplace life, as it could be in any other; nay, is more certainly free to us in that way of life, because it is our own, that is, because so God has ordained it for us.

2. But perhaps it may be said, "This is not

my distress. I have no desire to go out of my lot into disproportioned habits; but I do not comply with this tendency of which you speak. This is the point where I 'cleave to the dust.' I make no advance in the spiritual life." In answer it may be said, that we are too hasty in looking for signs of advancement. In one sense, indeed, we cannot be too impatient; I mean, we cannot too much desire to become sinless. But whatever may be our desire, patience is our duty. The dealings of God are wonderful. "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain."[1] God has a seed-time, and a burial, sometimes long and strange, of the germs of spiritual life, before the feast of in-gathering is fully come. What a miracle is the gift of regeneration, which awaits its ripeness in the morning of the resurrection! What to all eyes more sickly than the soul, more dead than the body? So through all our spiritual life there is an order and a cycle of seasons and changes—"seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night."[2] All things move on in a procession of measured and temperate advance, obeying some eternal law of the Divine will, adjusted to the conditions of the Divine image as it is in us; and by this law all

[1] St. James v. 7. [2] Gen. viii. 22.

anomalies will be one day solved. The Divine hand never moves like ours, in a lawless haste. Even seeming exceptions have their proper laws, unknown to us. For it is most true that sometimes it has pleased God to anticipate in a moment of time, (as when, by one act, He created the fruit-tree having its seed in itself,) the growth and ripeness of years: such was the repentance of David, the bitter weeping of St. Peter, the conversion of St. Paul. So, a single word, or a moment of intense agony, or the aspect of a holy countenance, or realities which, as this world neither sees or knows, so neither will it believe, have been known to work at once the perfect and abiding conversion of a sinner. But such things in the spiritual world are as lightning in the world of nature. The day and the night are not illuminated by sudden streams of fire, but by steady lights, and by their slow gradual ascents. This reveals the gentleness, as the other the sovereignty, of God. It is by this same even and stedfast law, that the spiritual world, or the sanctification of the soul in man, advances to its ripeness. We must not look out for the harvest when we have only cast the seed, nor for the vintage when we have but yesterday bound up the vines. The sin that dwells in us is strong and stubborn, and the very law of our sanctification is, that we should be cleansed from it through the persevering

struggle of our will, and the entire hatred of our spiritual nature. God does not cleanse us as if we were dead and passive. Perhaps this would best suit our indolence, but not our destiny of bliss. He made us without our act; but He will not save us unless we be fellow-workers together with Him. For when He made us, "man became,"—not a clod of helpless, lifeless earth, but "a living soul."[1] This is our wonderful being; and this shews why sloth is one of the seven deadly sins. It is the direct abdication of living powers, of the living soul given to us of God. It is spiritual suicide, a wilful return into dust and death. This, then, gives us the law of our probation, and reveals to us why all growth in grace is slow; because it is to be attained by the progressive and persevering action of our moral nature, under the conditions of the fall, and against the antagonist powers of temptation. There are, without doubt, deeper reasons still, which we shall one day know; for we mistake in thinking that perfection is to be found only in the ultimate form and fulness of any creature. Every stage has its perfect beauty; as childhood, youth, and manhood. Indeed, what is the fulness of the creature? what ultimate and changeless form has any finite being? Our perfection, it may be, is eternal growth; everlasting

[1] Gen. ii. 7.

approach to the Infinite, which is for ever inaccessible. So it is in the life of grace. The stages of trial have, we may believe, each one of them, a peculiar character and acceptance in the sight of God.

But besides this, there are some very clear and open reasons why our growth is suffered to be slow. Nothing so lays the axe to the root of pride. We would fain be to-day as pure as angels; but before to-morrow, it may be, we should lift up ourselves as Satan. The consciousness of sin is very galling and humbling; we chafe and complain of it: but is all this trouble a sincere and tranquil sorrow from the pure love of God? By no means. Sin betrays us into a thousand faults, and into habitual follies; it hurts our self-love, and mortifies our vanity. It would be so graceful to be a saint; so lovely in the eyes of others; so soothing to ourselves. Oh, the depth of the craft and of the wiles of the Devil! Even our holier aspirations he taints, and turns against our souls. There is infinite compassion and infinite care in leaving our sins to be our shame and scourge; lest God's best gifts should be our snare, and life itself our death. Truly our souls cleave unto the dust, not as we complain, but as we are little aware. We are often most earthly when we believe ourselves to be most spiritual. So hard is it to open our ears.

Well might the prophet cry thrice, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord."[1] The faults and inward temptations which still cleave to us are, doubtless, a lighter evil and a less danger than elation and self-confidence. We do not make advances in zeal, fervour, devotion, charity, self-denial; and we complain of it. Of whom do we complain? Not of God, for He gives more grace than we ever take and use; not of Satan, for that would be to accuse our probation; not of sin, for it is an abstraction, and has no personal existence; not of ourselves, because we are the supposed complainants. What, then, is our complaint? It is, that we are what we are. But complaints will not make us better; they will not increase our faith, deepen our humility, quicken our hope, break our pride; for no man ever yet became humble only by complaining; and the one and only cure which can break our pride would also take away our complaints; and that is, true humility, and a perfect conformity to the will of God; enduring and rejoicing to be just as He would have us; and believing that whatsoever messenger of Satan buffet us, His grace is sufficient for our stay. This, then, is a direct answer for all sincere minds. Persevere in patience and obedience, and cast "all your care upon Him." "Take no

[1] Jer. xxii. 29.

thought for the morrow." "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Get the day well over and done with an upright and open heart, and leave to-morrow and growth to Him who alone "giveth the increase." Do not be cast down because you feel no religious emotions,—such as warmth of thankfulness and kindling of love to God, peace, delight in prayer, and the like. This is very blessed, when God sees good to give it; but there is something better for us, and more pleasing to Him; and that is, persevering obedience, patience in prayer and praise, under discouragements, infirmity, and darkness, even as if we were forsaken. He loves our love, but He loves our persevering trust above all our sensible emotions. The deepest teachers in this high wisdom bid all sincere Christians to be thankful when they are led rather by this path of the Cross, though they seem to cleave painfully to its rugged ways, than by the smoother and brighter avenues of His kingdom. Leave all this in His hand. The cup and the baptism are of His sole dispensing. If we choose, it may be, we shall even by choosing do amiss.

3. But perhaps it will be said again, "This would be all very well, if I were not conscious of positive faults, and sometimes even of falling back into those of which I have repented. It is not

only that I do not advance in devotion, but I am still in 'the dust of death:' positive evils are alive within me, and I often see them even more active than before." Now this may be, and will be true, if we give over to watch, and to obey the light of conscience. But, speaking still to sincere minds, it may be said, that we are no sure judges of this matter. A growing consciousness of sin is no certain sign of growing sinfulness; but, on the contrary, a probable sign of growing sanctification: as sinfulness grows, insensibility increases; as the soul is sanctified, its keen discernment of sin is strengthened and enlarged. At first sight, then, it is more probable that the very cause of complaint ought to be a cause of encouragement. For let us bear in mind that the same Will which, in wisdom, has ordained the law of slow growth for our spiritual life, has also, in love, ordained a slow perception of our sinfulness. Some have ventured to pray without limitation and without fear, that God would shew them their inward sinfulness as He sees it: a prayer well intended, but withal very rash. It shews how little we know of the hatefulness of sin in the sight of God; how faint a consciousness we have of our own deformity. If such a prayer were granted, if we could see ourselves as an object of sight in all the leprosy and death of our sin, we should perhaps

perish in despair. Nothing but a divine eye, or an eye pure from sin, can look without fear and peril upon such a vision of horror as a soul fallen from God. Our faith, hope, and love, are so feeble, that a revelation of what we are, would perhaps drive us to the end of Judas, and give us our portion with him in "his own place." It would seem incredible to believe, impossible to hope in forgiveness, and fear would cast out love. Now, in this there is great and tender compassion; it is only little by little, in measure and gentle degrees, that He reveals to us what we are in His eyes; and even that He makes known by giving us His grace, so that we see what we are as we cease so to be. We see ourselves in reflection, cast behind us, as the reality passes away; we discern what we *were* by becoming what we *are*. Of what we were, and of what we see, we have indeed a consciousness by way of recollection; but what we are, by God's mercy to us, is never fully realised. Sickness is full of self, but health has no self-contemplation. Therefore, let it be supposed that we do far more clearly see, far more keenly feel our sinfulness; that is not a proof that we are more sinful, no, nor that we are still as sinful as before; but rather that an awakened discernment, and an intenser hatred of evil issuing from a real endowment of Divine grace, has made us perceive with a truer

and fuller sense the sins which once were our own.

This will be clearer by examples. What reveals our pride, and makes us hate it, but the beginnings of humility? What makes anger a torment, but the love of meekness? What makes self-indulgence contemptible, but a desire to suffer hardship? What makes want of love, or coldness in prayer, an affliction, but a sense of the blessedness of God's presence? What makes the thought of declension, or standing still, or cleaving to the dust, to be a misery and a sorrow, but the aspiration of a heart quickened with the spirit of perseverance, and panting to press onward to the face of God? This is the secret way in which the presence of God, sanctifying the soul in man, reveals Itself; not by direct self-manifestation, but by its effects. As in sight and hearing: we perceive external objects, and not our own faculties: the eye does not see itself, but lights and shades; the ear does not hear itself, but harmonies and discords; still less can the eye or ear perceive the true percipient within, which is ourselves. So is it with the Holy Spirit of God. He reveals all things besides, while He conceals Himself. He reveals past sins of thought, word, and deed: the unholiness of childhood, youth, and after years; present sinfulness of imagination, heart, and

will; pride, hardness, impurity, impatience, sloth, softness, anger, want of zeal, thankfulness, love, and devotion: all these He sets before the soul in clear array. But He hides meekness, gentleness, self-mistrust, self-contempt, charity, sorrow for sin, self-accusation, and the like; these things are most hidden from those who have them in the largest measures. They are seen of angels, confessed by men; but unknown, disbelieved by those in whom they dwell; the gift of humility by itself alone conceals them all: so that such persons are sure to think themselves to be the least advanced, who, in truth, are most advanced; as they are ever the first who believe themselves to be the last. Speaking, then, still of sincere Christians, it may be said that these complaints of conscious and abiding faults, so long as they are not willingly indulged, and this increased sense of inward sinfulness, is no sign of cleaving to the dust; but rather that God in love is drawing them on. He is making known to them the fall as it exists in their inmost life, in prelude to making them conscious partakers of the bliss for which they are already unconsciously being prepared.

But as the whole of this subject is so nearly akin to the dangers of a self-contemplative state, the surest and best remedy for such complaints will be found in practical rules; of which the

two following may, by God's blessing, be found useful.

1. The first is, to reduce our self-examination to definite points. It is a hurtful mistake to give way to feelings which have no definite and ascertained foundation; by which I mean, general feelings of dissatisfaction with our state; vague discomfort at what we have been, or still are; excited emotions as to our coldness, deadness, insensibility, and so on. Like sweeping confessions, these are of little use, spring from no real self-knowledge, and issue in no real amendment. The only feelings which are good and trustworthy are those which arise upon definite and certain facts, either of our past life or of our present consciousness. These are penitential; the others seldom or never really are. For repentance is sorrow founded on the consciousness of distinct acts of sin. The best and safest course, then, is to confine our self-examination, at least for awhile, to particular points; and for a time to cast aside all other feelings and thoughts about ourselves. Now the proper subjects of repentance and confession are chiefly these: definite acts of sin, whether in deed, in word, or in thought, in which there has been a full and deliberate consent of the will. It is this consent which constitutes the act; the form of it is indifferent.

Whether it issue in deed or in word is all one; and whether it issue outwardly or be suppressed within, as in thought, yet if the will deliberately consent, it is all the same. Our will is our moral nature, as our life is our natural being. All circumstances or consequences are only the modes of its acting, or the forms of its manifestation. A proud act, a proud word, or a proud thought, deliberately indulged, all alike make us guilty of pride, though not in equal degrees. It is bad to harbour the thought, worse to indulge it in word, and worst of all in act; but these differ not in kind, but only in degree. This applies equally to every kind of sin. If we can trace any of these in ourselves, they are tokens of cleaving to the dust, and subjects worthy of sorrow. But it is vague and useless to complain generally, that we are proud, and the like; for that really, in the end, only leads us away from specific self-examination and specific repentance. But besides these three degrees of sin, there is still another over which we must watch, and that is, wrong *feelings* indulged for any length of time. It is impossible to fix a measure of time by hours or minutes; for the acts of our moral nature cannot be told upon a dial. But if we suffer these feelings to dwell in us long enough for us to reflect upon them, they become deliberate, and so tend to become habitual. As

such they are a direct resistance to the Spirit of love, joy, and peace; and, therefore, become actual sins and specific matter of repentance. Now if we can trace in ourselves the increase of these indulged feelings in frequency, duration, or power, we may justly fear that we are not advancing. But if not, then let all other feelings of fear, discouragement, and sadness, be cast away as temptations against faith, hope, and love, the three great gifts of the Holy Spirit, — the three fountains of obedience and perseverance. There is an unclean Spirit of sadness, which is a special enemy of Christians; and the most subtil of all, because so like an angel of light. It is he that comes and personates the angel of repentance, to lead us into deeps, where we may "be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow."[1] This is "the sorrow that worketh death;"[2] but "we are not ignorant of his devices."

2. And then, having reduced our self-examination to definite points, let us, from the sins we have so detected, choose out some one against which to direct our chief watchfulness and strength. Whatever be our besetting sin, let us take that; be it our worst, or our oldest, or the sin we oftenest commit. With that for awhile let our whole contest lie. As the king of Syria com-

[1] 2 Cor. ii. 11. [2] 2 Cor. vii. 10.

manded the captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel;"[1] so let us turn the whole of our care, watchfulness, and recollection, upon that one. The benefit of such a rule is, that it strengthens our self-discipline, by bringing it all to bear at once upon one point. Our chief danger is vagueness, and the weakness of wandering up and down without aim, plan, or perseverance. In this way we shall overcome no sin. Like an army making scattered and unsupported attacks over the whole seat of war, instead of concentrating its strength, by solidity and unity of force, for some decisive stroke; so when people try to overcome all their sins at once, they are overcome themselves by each in turn. And, further: the self-discipline required to conquer one sin is as full and as complete as if we were engaged against the whole array. The very same habits of mind are all called into action, and a twofold good is the result; first, that while we are consciously engaged only with one, we really are, at the same time, more effectively keeping down the rest; and next, that when one is mastered, the whole principle of self-discipline has gained the victory over the whole principle of sin. In conquering one, we have virtually conquered all. In taking the king, we

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 31.

have scattered all the host. Great conversions even of hardened sinners have been wrought by the observance of a single rule. We read of some whose whole change of life began by saying once a-day, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" or by kissing the ground every day, and saying, "To-morrow I may be dead;" or by coming to a friend or spiritual guide every time they committed some one particular sin; all the rest being for a time left without discipline, and seemingly, because really it could not be, without care. If, then, people would take selfishness, or personal vanity, or impatience in argument, or bitter words against others, or indulged envy, or any sin of the senses or of the thoughts, or the like, and whensoever they commit it, make it known to some one whom they may choose, they would find, by God's grace, that their whole religious life would put off the moody, complaining, disheartening emotions which overcloud their faith, and become definite, practical, and cheerful. We should then have a mark by which to know the ebb and flow of the tide; and we should leave no room for temptations, which, when they sadden our hearts, shake our filial trust in God.

Of course, in giving these two rules so barely and nakedly, I leave to be understood all that belongs to the higher sources of help and strength.

I suppose that people of sincere minds, such as I have spoken of, will make these self-examinations and confessions on their knees, and that they will not resolve with any confidence in their own power, but will offer their resolutions with special prayers for aid, at some solemn time, as in the Holy Communion, to God. Our only hope, not only of advancement in the spiritual life, but of perseverance and of stedfastness, is in fellowship with Him. In our ignorance we know not what is best for us. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?"[1] But one thing we do certainly know to be good: "It is good for me to hold me fast by God;"[2] and then nothing can fail. Whatsoever be our trial, we know that "going through this vale of misery, we may use it for a well," whereon at noon, in the burden of the day, as at Sychar, we may sit and rest with our Lord; and that, by His presence and help, we shall "go from strength to strength, till we appear every one of us before" His face in Zion. For He is "the way" foretold by the prophets: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."[3]

[1] Ps. iv. 6.

[2] Ps. lxxiii. 27, Psalter in Book of Common Prayer.

[3] Isaiah xxx. 21.

For "an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."[1]

[1] Isaiah xxxv. 8.

SERMON IX.

THE GIFT OF ABUNDANT LIFE.

St. John x. 10.

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Our Lord here declares the great end for which He came into the world, that we "might have life." He had already said this oftentimes before; as to Nicodemus; "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Again at Capernaum: "The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world;" and "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life."[1]

But here He speaks with a still greater fulness of meaning. He does not only say, "I am come that they might have life;" but still more, "and that they might have it *more abundantly*;" pro-

[1] St. John iii. 16; vi. 33; v. 40.

mising some great endowment, some greater gift of God than man had ever before received. This is the great grace of the Gospel, the abundant gift of life. Let us endeavour, by His help "who is our Life," to understand the depth and blessedness of this promise.

It may be thought that the words "more abundantly" are not intended as a measure of comparison with any other previous gift of God; but that they signify, as is the undoubted usage of the original as well as of other languages, only the largeness and fulness of the grace of life, which is in Christ. But, after all, it comes to the same; for, in such modes of speech, there is always some comparison involved, though it may be remotely, and in human speakers almost unconsciously, intended. In His words, who is Truth and the Wisdom of the Father, it is something more than error to suppose such a manner of speaking. Though He humbled Himself to use our speech, "never man spake like this Man."[1] There is a pure, divine, and perfect truth in every word of the Son of God. When He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," He intended, we must believe, that the gift of life through Himself should be in a fulness never given to man before. And it will not

[1] St. John vii. 46.

need many thoughts to shew us how graciously this promise is fulfilled.

St. John has in part led us into the right understanding of these words, by saying, "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ:"[1] and our Lord Himself still more fully, when He said, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die."[2] Life was given under, though not by, the law; and yet, not as it was to be given afterwards by Jesus Christ. Before He came, it was given in secret and in measure; after He came, openly and in abundance. But these words contain a deeper meaning than simply to say, that the Gospel of Christ is fuller of life than the law of Moses. In one word, they mean nothing less than this, that the gift of life, which is by Jesus Christ, is more abundant than was ever given, not only under the law, or before the law; not only to saints, prophets, patriarchs; but more abundant than in the grace of creation, and in the gift of life with which Adam was endowed in Paradise. "I am come that they might have life," in measure more abundant, in manner more divine, in continuance more abiding, than was ever yet revealed.

[1] St. John i. 17. [2] St. John vi. 49, 50.

This declares to us the great gift of indwelling life, which is now bestowed upon us by the Son of God through the Holy Ghost.

First, then, the gift or spirit of life dwells in those who are united to Christ, in a fulness more abundant than was ever revealed before.

When God made man in His own image and likeness, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, he became "a living soul:" he was perfect in body and soul, endowed with the grace of God, sinless and immortal. We may ask, What more, as man, could he be? St. Paul gives us an inspired answer: "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." And again, "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven."[1] Now, what does he intend by these words? He teaches us that Adam was a mere man, made of the earth, endowed with life as a gift of God; but that Christ, who is God and man, is a man Divine, possessing life in Himself. The life possessed by Adam was in the measure of his own infirmity; the life which is in Christ is in the fulness of a Divine manhood. Adam was united to God only by God's grace and power. Christ is God made man. The humanity of Adam was only human; in Christ the manhood is become divine. The

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 45, 47.

union of the Godhead with the manhood endowed it with a substantial grace, whereby it was deified. And it was from the miraculous conception filled with the fulness of all grace. His very manhood became the fountain, a great deep of all grace. Therefore He said, "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son," both as God and as man, "to have life in Himself."[1] "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will."[2] This was the prophecy of St. John Baptist: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."[3] And it was His own promise, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"[4] And, after He had entered into His glory, St. John bare witness that this promise had been fulfilled: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His

[1] St. John v. 26. [2] Ib. 21. [3] St. Matt. iii. 11.
[4] St. John vii. 37-39.

glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace :"[1] that is to say, the anointing which was upon Him has flowed down to us. The Spirit which descended upon our Head hath run down to the least member of His body, even "to the skirts of His clothing." When the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He "received gifts for men ;" that is, the full dispensation of grace was committed unto the second Adam. The Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son descends upon us through Him. Wherefore "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, proceeds unto us through the Word made flesh. The Incarnation is the channel of His influence, of His presence. He dwells in man as He never dwelt before : by unity of substance with the Word, by very presence through the Word in us. This is the interior life and reality of the True Vine. "It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."[2] My outward, visible, and local presence shall, through His coming, be inward, invisible, univer-

[1] St. John i. 14, 16. [2] Ch. xvi. 7.

sal. "If I depart, I will send Him unto you." From My Father's throne He shall proceed from Me to you. He shall "abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be *in* you."[1] To this end God "hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."[2] For all His members are "an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."[3] "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body."[4] "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you." "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit."[5]

These passages, which might easily be multiplied, teach us that the great gift of Christ is life, given to us by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Throughout the Old Testament, and especially the prophets, as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Joel,[6] the outpouring of the Spirit is foretold as the great grace of the Messiah who was to come; and these prophecies, as St. Peter teaches, had

[1] St. John xiv. 16, 17. [2] Ephes. i. 22.
[3] Ephes. ii. 21, 22. [4] 1 Cor. xii. 13. [5] Ch. vi. 19, 17.
[6] Isaiah xliv. 4; Jerem. xxxi. 33; Joel ii. 28, 29.

their opening fulfilment on the day of Pentecost. They are fulfilling now, and shall be ever fulfilling until the end of the world. The great gift of life has been bestowed upon a world dead in sin: not by measure, nor by gifts shed abroad, nor in saints scattered up and down in the earth from age to age; but first, in the gift of the Word made flesh, in the Divine manhood of the Son, in whom dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;"[1] and then, by the Holy Ghost, "the Lord and Giver of life," who, through the Incarnation, has descended into us, to dwell in us, not only by outward gifts, and accidental endowments of grace, but by an inward and abiding inhabitation in our whole personal nature. If we may speak of heavenly things by earthly, we may say that, as our natural life, which is whole in all our being, is whole in every part, so the Spirit of Christ, which is in all His mystical body, or rather as the finite is in the infinite, in which His mystical body wholly is,—that same fulness of spiritual life is in every member of the same; in each one of us the Spirit dwells, not by division, or mere emanation, or effect, but by personal presence, inhabitation, and life. We have it then not as men, but as members of Christ, as partakers of His humanity in whom all fulness dwells.[2]

[1] Col. ii. 9. [2] Ib. i. 19.

And the gift of life is not a power, a principle, but a very and true Person dwelling in us. This is the regeneration for which all ages waited till the Word was made flesh — the new birth of water and of the Spirit, of which the Baptism of Christ is the ordained sacrament. Here, then, we see a part of this great promise. In one word, it is the fulness of life given to us by the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which Christ, by His Incarnation, has bestowed upon us.

2. And besides this, the gift of life is abundant, not only in its fulness, but in its continuance. To Adam God said, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." He sinned once, and died. "By one man"—and by one sin of that one man—"sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Not only did he die, but we in him. The head died, and the members with the head; "so death passed upon all men." We died before we came into the world: we came dead into life; born of a family, the head of which died on the threshold of creation. The life of God departed from him, and from us, who were summed up in him. The endowments of grace, which were also gifts of life, reverted to God who gave them. The earth returned "to the dust as it was." Divine and just severity; severe and Divine justice! The gift of life departed from

him, and from all for whom he had received it. This free and sovereign gift which was never ours by right, nor his until freely given, and given upon a Divine and declared law of obedience, reverted to the Giver. Nay, more, what is the fall of man but the knowledge of good and evil? and what is his misery and his sorrow, what are the griefs and the thorns of life, but that knowledge which God forbade on pain of death? To know it, is to die. God did not more forbid sin than death itself. But he chose death, and took it as his portion. Life departed, because he chose to die. Such was man's first estate, and such was our estate in him. All that we had of God was stored up in him when he made shipwreck of himself and us. We were in the power and in the probation of another; of a man weak and frail as ourselves.

But in this the gift of life, which is by the Spirit of Christ, has more abundantly restored our original loss. By the regeneration of the Holy Ghost we are engrafted into the second Adam, very man, not frail and weak, but also very God, changeless and almighty. We are gathered under a Head which cannot fail; and are members of Him who hath revealed His own Divine Name: "I am—the Life." He has overcome both sin and death for us: sin in the wilderness and upon the Cross, death in hell and in

the grave; and He is gone up on high, above all created life, Creator Himself of all. Our Head, the second Adam, is in the throne of God, and Himself is God. We are consubstantial with the manhood of Him, who is consubstantial with the Godhead of the Father and of the Holy Ghost. We are united to God by a direct participation of Him who is both God and man; and are thereby "made partakers of the Divine nature."[1]

In this, again, we see the abundance of the life which He has given us. We cannot die in our Head, because He *is* Life eternal; nor can we die in ourselves, except we cast out the Giver of life, who is in us. Our first head fell, and drew us with him into the grave; our second Head is in heaven, and "our life is hid with Him in God." We can die no more by any federal death, but only by our own several and personal death. If sinners die eternally, they die one by one, of their own free choice, even as Adam. And we now die no more by single acts of disobedience; but only by a resolved and deliberate career of sinning. This reveals to us the wonderful love and miraculous longsuffering of Christ and of the Spirit who dwells in us. When once He enters, there He abides with Divine endurance. What, alas! is the life of the whole visible body of Christ, of

[1] 2 St. Peter i. 4.

every member, every baptized soul, but a strife of sin against the Spirit? Even the holiest, even they who are sanctified from childhood, and perhaps they more sorrowfully than all, confess this. And yet the Spirit of life abides in us, bears with us, will not give us up. Though we slight Him, though we grieve Him, though our slights and grievings rise into resistance, and issue in acts, even in habits of rebellion; though sins, even deadly sins, defile His dwelling, and spurn His Presence, and that for years, through boyhood into youth, and youth into manhood, aye, into age and grey hairs, yet He does not depart. He will still abide, plead, convince, alarm us, day by day, and year by year, until that dread time known before the secret tribunal in Christ's righteous kingdom, when the regenerate soul can no more be renewed unto repentance. But how long that time is in coming, we must every one of us fully know. If it were not as far off as the end of God's longsuffering, it would have come upon us long ago. We should long since have died eternally. One sin,—and death fell on Adam. Sins, as the sand on the sea-shore, are upon our heads; and yet we live. What makes this balance hang so unevenly in our behalf? The Blood of the Son of God. The abundant gift of life through the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. What a revela-

tion of the Divine patience is the visible Church, in which the Spirit of abundant life these eighteen hundred years has dwelt, ruling, enlightening, inspiring, guiding, cleansing, enduring with endless longsuffering the wayward wills of men. What a miracle of patience is the indefectibility of the Church of Christ. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This is the foundation of our strength. We know that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."[1] He will not revoke them till we have cast them away. On this patient love we have rested unawares until this day. He has borne with us, and upheld us even against ourselves; and we know, that if we will hold fast by Him, He will never let us go. We may stay our weakness upon His strength, our mortality upon the Giver of life. In Him we already partake of the eternal world, and are lifted above the power of death. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is* passed from death unto life."[2] "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."[3] Out of His fulness we are filled;

[1] Rom. xi. 29. [2] St. John v. 24. [3] Ib. xi. 25, 26.

by His Divine Incarnation we are upheld; by His indwelling Spirit we live in the midst of death, in the heart of a world dead in sin, in the atmosphere of death, which is the very breath of our natural life: so that now death itself is no more death but sleep; a kindly change, loosening the grave-clothes, which swathe the true life He has bestowed upon us; and setting us at large, to live in the freedom and fulness of the Spirit, and to wait for Him who is "the Resurrection and the Life" of the kingdom of God. For what destiny of bliss Adam was created, is not revealed. All that we read is of his felicity in a Paradise on earth. And though we may believe that he would have been, in due time, translated to a nearer access to the vision of God, yet it is only through the Incarnation that the eternal indwelling of God in man, and of man in God, is assured to us. In this we see the perfection of the Divine kingdom, which ascends in a scale of infinite perfection. The redemption is not a mere restoration of the fall of man; but a deeper mystery of love, carrying the works both of the wisdom and of the power of God upward in the order of bliss. This, then, is the meaning of His great promise, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Let us draw from what has been said one or

two practical truths of great importance in our daily life.

1. And first, we hereby know that in all our acts there is a Presence higher than our own natural and moral powers. We were united to Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit from our Baptism. There has never been a moment from the first dawn of consciousness, from the first twilight of reason, and the first motions of the will, when the Spirit of life has not been present with us. He has created in us the first dispositions to truth and holiness; every good desire was from Him. He has prevented us in all good intentions, restrained us in all evil. He has, as it were, beset our whole spiritual nature, and encompassed us on all sides, guiding us into the will of God. From the Spirit of Christ we received not our will,—for that was in our nature,—but every good inclination. By our fallen state, the will is of itself inclined to evil. It is in bondage to its own evil. It can no more release itself than water can stand as a wall, or a dry rod shoot with blossoms. The law of its fallen nature is to incline to evil, as the law of fire is to ascend in flame. By nature, then, our will is both free, and not free; freely enslaved, and yet without power to unchain itself. And this the Spirit of Christ does for us. He makes sin fearful, terrible, bitter, and hateful, till the will

shrinks from it, as we draw back from a searing fire. He reveals in our soul, the hideousness and deadliness of evil, till we tremble at it, and are willing to tear ourselves away from its allurements. But this willingness in itself is impotent. Left to ourselves we should be in bondage still. The sin that dwells in us belongs to our very nature, because it is fallen; so that when we have received a better will, we need the power to be free. We have power to bind ourselves, but not to loose; for when we have put on the fetter, there is another hand which turns the bolt, and by ourselves we can loose it no more. But the Spirit who gave us our new birth is God. Before Him all bonds fall off. If only we yield our will to Him, His power shall be ours: and by His help, every sin of the soul is broken through, and we are set free; not by our own power, not by our own will; though it be still with our own act, willingly and freely. This is the office of the Holy Spirit in all our sanctification. He first inspires thoughts, inclinations, desires, intentions of holiness. He goes before, leading the way; winning us on by soft inward persuasions and by a sweet sense of God's will; giving us, with a holy will, also a power above our own. The working of the Spirit is, so to speak, co-extensive with our whole moral being. He presides over all the springs of thought, word,

and deed: by His gracious Presence endowing us with power and will to mortify sin, and to live in holiness. And this gift of the Spirit of holiness is itself the gift of life. "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. . . . But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. . . . But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."[1] What, then, is our life but the presence of the Spirit dwelling in us?

2. Another plain and practical truth is, that this Presence works in us according to the revealed and fixed laws of our probation. Because there is some apparent difficulty of reconciling these two revealed facts, many have chosen to believe either the one or the other, but refused to believe in both. As if they could be inconsistent. As if God were the author of confusion, the revealer of contradictions. There may, indeed, be mystery, but can be no discord. In the kingdom of God there must be agencies so diverse as to surpass our knowledge. How is it with things nearest to our sense? Who can tell how the material brain is the instrument

[1] Rom. viii. 6, 9, 11.

of thought, or how the whole bodily frame obeys the complex motions of the will, how the hand answers to every creation of the mind? What is the point of contact between intellectual and animal life? When we can lay down this as a basis, it will be time to build upon it the further knowledge,—what is the point of contact between the Divine life and our spiritual life. Nevertheless, there is less of difficulty than some would have us believe. If we may reverently take as an example the Person of the Son of God, we shall see that the Divine and the human wills in Him, though ever two, as the two natures were ever perfect, were also in action ever one by a free perfect harmony. So is it, in a manner, with us, who are regenerate by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Divine will is ever present with our personal will, presiding, restraining, persuading us. We may, indeed, wholly and finally resist it: for we have the power, if we have the will; because the power of resistance is the sinful will itself; as our Lord has said; "Ye *will* not come to Me, that ye might have life." And as our resistance, so is His persuasion: the force by which our will is changed from evil to good, from resistance to compliance, is a moral force. If it were any other, it would defeat itself. The force of constraint multiplies unwillingness: only moral suasions win

the will to free assent. And these moral suasions, drawn from all depths of love and fear, from life and death, from heaven and hell, from sin and from the Cross, are perpetually pressing upon the regenerate will. They bear upon it with the pressure of the Divine presence, which reveals them in us; as a water-flood presses with the whole weight of its stream upon a bolted wheel, waiting till it give way. The wheel may resist, but it cannot move alone. So with the persuasions of the Divine Spirit. They do not overbear and carry away before them the fragments of our moral nature, but wait upon them, and move them according to their own natural laws. For who is He that persuades but the same who made us? He knows the creature of His hands, and is come not to destroy, but to fulfil; to heal and create anew what sin has corrupted. His persuasions are by illuminations of truth and inspirations of holiness; and these are powers which act not by force, but like the lights and dews of Heaven, by a piercing virtue, infusing new gifts of fruitfulness and power into the works of God. What we receive of the Divine Spirit is so given to us as to become our own, and as our own we use it with a perfect freedom of the will.

3. Lastly, we may learn that the union of this Divine Presence with us in our probation, issues

in the last and crowning grace of this life, the gift of perseverance. "Being confident," St. Paul says to the Philippians, ". . . that He which hath begun a good work in you will perfect the same unto the day of Jesus Christ."[1] "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."[2]

If any sincere Christian cast himself with his whole will upon the Divine Presence which dwells within him, he shall be kept safe unto the end. This is the spiritual union and mutual knowledge of which our Lord speaks when He says: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me:" then comes the promise of perseverance: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."[3] What is it that makes us unable to persevere? Is it want of strength? By no means. We have with us the strength of the Holy Spirit. When did we ever set ourselves sincerely to any work according to the will of God, and fail for want of strength? It was not that strength failed the will, but that the will failed first. There is the seat of all our weakness, the source of all instability. If we could but embrace the Divine will with the whole love of ours; cleaving to it, and holding fast by it, we should be borne along

[1] Phil. i. 6. [2] 1 Thess. v. 24.
[3] St. John x. 27, 28.

as upon "the river of the water of life." And what is it that hinders us? I am not now speaking of those who indulge in wilful sin; but of those who desire to persevere in the love of God—what is it hinders us? It is the remains of unsubdued faults of mind, such as impatience, stubbornness, wilfulness; or of indolence, sloth, and coldness; or it is the conscious want of holy affections, of thankfulness, praise, love, grace, devotion; and, therefore, of endurance and self-denial for Christ's sake. These are the things which make our hold of the Divine will so loose and slack. We feel it to be a high and severe blessedness, for which our hearts are too feeble and earthward. And therefore we open only certain chambers of our will to the influence of the Divine will. We are afraid of being wholly absorbed into it; lest, if I may so say, "the Spirit of the Lord" should take us "up, and cast us upon some mountain, or into some valley,"[1] far from all joys, consolations, friends, and home. And yet, if we would have peace, we must be altogether united to Him. For unless we be wholly conformed to His will, we shall never attain the gift of perseverance; or at least, we shall always doubt and fear of our holding out; and when perseverance is doubtful, there can be no true peace.

[1] 2 Kings ii. 16.

Let us, then, endeavour so to embrace the gift of life which is in us, that nothing may separate us from Him; that no choice, no intent, no affection, no permitted motion of our will, may cast a shadow between us and His presence. And then let us fear nothing. We need fear no temptations; for He will either turn them aside, or carry us through: we need not be dismayed at the stubborn strength of the sins against which we are contending; for He will cast them all out at last: we need not be out of heart, even at our sensible coldness, slackness of intention, impotence of will: for He will kindle the love of God within us; and give us, in His own time, the zeal and energy of a fervent repentance. We have but one thing to make sure, and He will provide all the rest. If His will be our will, He will quicken and cleanse, kindle and sanctify us in body, and soul, and spirit. It is not for us to look back, except in repentance, or to look on, except in hope. The past is no longer ours; the future is His. *Now* is our probation: to trust, to believe His love, to be prompt, compliant to the guidance of His inspirations. His Presence is in us, leading us to rest. Our safety and our peace is to abide under its shadow. Therein can enter nothing that defileth; nothing savouring of death. If the memory of past sin makes you afraid, ask of the Spirit which is in

you the gift of sorrow; if the proved instability of your will makes you almost despair, ask of Him the gift of perseverance. He is in you as a fountain of life, deep as Eternity, inexhaustible as God. The rivers of His strength, healing, consolation, are never stayed, except in hearts barren and dry. In the humble, hoping, loving, trustful heart, the waters of life pour forth in an exuberant flood. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them: I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."[1] This is the gift of the Spirit in the soul of man; and the source of it has been revealed from heaven. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."[2]

[1] Isaiah xli. 17, 18. [2] Rev. xxii. 1, 17.

SERMON X.

THE CITY OF GOD.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20.

"Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body."

ST. PAUL, in these words, is strengthening the Christians at Philippi, by setting before them the greatness of their calling and of their destiny. They had much need of encouragement; for a time of sore and peculiar trial was then upon them. They had to endure not only bitter persecutions and the assault of Antichrists, wielding the powers of the world to wear out the saints of the Most High, but a still more dangerous, because more subtil trial. They were being tried by false and sensual men mingling in the communion of the Church. There were among them false teachers,

who mixed up the law of Moses with the gospel of Christ; double-minded men, steering between both; striving to escape persecution, and yet desiring to obtain the reputation of Christians. These were very dangerous tempters, who entered the Church in disguise, defiling it, and destroying souls for whom Christ died.

There was one special mark by which such men (as we see both from St. Paul and St. John) might be known: they lived evil lives. Therefore here St. Paul sets before the Philippians a contrast of carnal and spiritual Christians, and of the earthly and the heavenly life. After saying, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things;" he adds, "For our conversation is in heaven."

The word here rendered 'conversation' means something further and more specific than our word commonly signifies. It means the *estate*, and therefore the *rights* and the *duties* of a citizen of any city.

We see, therefore, that by this word he intends:

1. First, to bid them remember that God had made them citizens of the holy city. "Our con-

versation is in heaven :" that is, our true home is not here, but on high. "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."[1] And we, by our Baptism, are made free of it: we are partakers of the freedom which is in Christ. This is the city of which St. Paul speaks when he says, "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."[2] And again, when he says, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come;"[3] "a city which hath foundations."[4] And St. John, in the last great prophecy given through him to the Church, saw that city, builded four-square, perfect every way, on twelve foundations, having in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. It was built at unity with itself, perfect in structure and in symmetry, its length as great as its breadth; its walls were of all manner of precious stones, and its streets of pure gold, clear as glass: a wonderful vision, full of mystery, and of meaning partly revealed, partly hidden, and by hiding made even more glorious and majestic. It sets before us the unity,

[1] Gal. iv. 26.
[2] Heb. xii. 22, 23.
[3] Heb. xiii. 14.
[4] Ch. xi. 10.

multitude, perfection, glory, and bliss, of Christ's saints, gathered under Him in the kingdom of God. Of this city and company, the whole Church on earth, and, in it, the Christians in Philippi, were citizens and partakers. St. Paul tells them this, to remind them that they were no longer isolated one from another, but incorporated into one body. Sin, as it rends man from God, so it rends man from man. It is the antagonist of all unity—a power of dissolution and of isolation. But the grace of Christ, by its first gift, binds again the soul of man with God, and the spirits of all the regenerate in one fellowship. We are taken out of a dead world, to be grafted into the living Church. Therefore St. Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus, that they were "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." They were thereby made subjects and servants of the King of saints, the Lord of the holy city. It became their own inheritance. Its courts were their resting-places, pledged to them and sure. Their names were written among those who should walk in the light of God and of the Lamb. This is the first meaning of the word.

2. And next it taught them, that as their state was, so their life should be; that as they were citizens of heaven, so their manner of life should be

heavenly too. Our word 'conversation' has a very complex and extensive signification. It means the whole course and context of a man's life, words, and actions; as in the book of Acts, where it is said, "while the Lord Jesus went in and out among us;"[1] that is, was familiarly present with us in the whole course and detail of His earthly life. By this, then, St. Paul means, that the whole of their life must needs be sanctified, penetrated in every part by the spirit of their calling. Though they were in the world, they had nothing in it, nor it in them. All its provinces and kingdoms, its cities and palaces, were nothing to them. All the pomps and gifts, the glitter and the pleasures of the world, were but snares and burdens. What part in these had they whose lot was in the heavenly Jerusalem? To them the fashion of this world was but a vision, luring and false, shifting and passing away. They were united to the eternal world, which has no variableness, neither shadow of turning; and to it they were fast advancing. The maxims, examples, rules of men, were no laws for their guidance: their only laws were the lives of God's servants —the order and the unity of heaven. As the visible Church bodies forth the invisible to the eye of flesh, so the invisible imposes its supremacy and dominion upon the visible Church. As the

[1] Acts i. 21.

head is the seat and source of thought, power, and command, so Christ is the fountain of all law, power, and order, to the body on earth. From Him comes holiness, and to Him holiness ascends again in adoration. Worship is the intense utterance of the sanctity of the Church. We see, then, in what the fellowship of the city of God consists: in the unity of the imperfect with the perfect; of the Church of one age with the Church of all ages; in the presence of Christ the Head through the Holy Ghost, in all the body visible and invisible; and this issuing on earth in the heavenly conversation of His servants. This has been the mystery at which the world has wondered, and upon which, in fear and foreboding, it has made incessant war. "Who shall not fear Thee, O King of saints," and Thy Body, which is eternal; the Church visible and imperishable, witnessing and suffering, but never consumed? This is the marvel of the mystery, at which the kings of the earth have shut their mouths, upon which the host of heaven look and worship, learning "the manifold wisdom of God." This, then, only too briefly, is the substance and outline of those few but great words of the apostle, "our conversation is in heaven."

See, therefore, how high is our calling. We are incorporated with the city of the living God.

It is all around us even now; we are within its walls, builded upon the apostles and prophets, encompassed by a cloud of witnesses. It is the city of refuge from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Many generations of its citizens have overcome, and are gone on before, ascending up on high. There is pledged to you as sure a mastery over all these enemies and powers as to them. They have won their crown; but yours, too, is sure. They who are now entered into rest, a little while ago were sinners and tempted; then penitents, now resting and crowned. Their earthly warfare has received its complement and fulness: what they strove to be, they are. They who prayed for humility are humble; for meekness, are meek; for purity, are "pure, even as He is pure." They who desired to know the truth, now see God, the Truth, uncreated, eternal. Remember this in all your temptations, doubts, and perils. When you are afraid, when you are ready to give way, when sluggish unwillingness weighs you down, and to persevere unto the end seems to be impossible,—then remember what they were who have entered through the gates into the city. The very same bliss is pledged to you: a spirit perfect as the Spirit of Christ, when He shall change your vile body, that it may be like unto His glorious body. They whom you have yielded up,

are only parted for awhile. They have gone up, after their mortal toil, and are resting now, laid up for the morning of the resurrection.

How great comfort is there here for all mourners. Be of good cheer, every one that is afflicted; for the Lord is preparing you for the city of God. Whatever be your sorrow, it is the token of His love, for the Man of sorrows is our King: and the path of sorrow is the path of His kingdom; there is none other that leadeth unto life. Your reward is sure, if you are but true to yourself. Do we believe these things? Are they realities, or are they words? They are God's Word, which is a reality. "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My word shall not pass away." It is when speaking of sorrows that St. Paul says, that God hath "predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son." "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, but not comforted, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."[1]

And if our calling be so high, how holy and searching must be the laws of that city. They

[1] Isaiah liv. 11-13.

are the laws of the heavenly court, of saints and of angels. Our law is the royal law, which has two great chapters, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself."[1] This is the decree which governs earth and heaven; it embraces the whole man, and searches out the depths of the spirit. "It was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."[2] This command is spiritual, sharper than any two-edged sword. It is the law of interior holiness—the Cross realised in the will—carried out in the manifold actings of life. If we would know how to expound it, we must imitate Christ our Lord. The words and the deeds of the King of saints are both text and comment. But if this be so, what is the state of the Church visible on earth? What signs does it bear of its heavenly origin? Where is its unity, and where its holiness? Where is the perfection of its citizens; where are the tokens of the royal law? Let us try ourselves by this rule.

1. It is plain, then, that where there is no

[1] St. Mark xii. 30, 31. [2] St. Matt. v. 21, 22.

outward obedience to these heavenly laws, there can be no real citizenship of heaven. A certain estate of citizenship there must be, because God gave it to us by our regeneration in holy Baptism. He bestowed upon us our justification; and gave us an inheritance among the saints in light. This is His act; for "it is God that justifieth." But though He bestow this freedom, what He gave, we may forfeit. If we break the laws, we thereby disfranchise ourselves of "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." Sinful Christians make themselves outlaws from the heavenly city; and the enemies of His cross have no part in it. They are under a ban of outlawry, beyond the protection of the law, though still subject to its penalties. Such are all blasphemers, scorners of God and of His grace, gluttonous and excessive persons, the impure and sensual, uncharitable and bitter, proud, hard-hearted, unmerciful, "whose end is destruction." "Into the holy city there shall enter nothing that defileth, or that worketh abomination, or that maketh a lie." And what is the condition of multitudes in the visible Church but this? It has even come to pass, that through the evil lives of the regenerate, men disbelieve the gift of regeneration; and deny the grant of heavenly freedom, which God of His sovereign grace gives to the Baptized. True, indeed, it is,

that sinners have no fellowship in the heavenly city, as rebels have no franchises or rights: yet they are subjects still; and must be judged by the violated laws of their heavenly Prince. Though we will not have Him to reign over us, He is still our King, and must be our Judge.

2. Again; this shews us that, even where there is outward obedience, there may yet be no true inward participation in the life and freedom of the heavenly city. This is a warning specially needed in these latter times: for there is much seeming and false Christianity in the world.

The orders and usages of society are a great check upon grosser transgressions. Public opinion —a heartless motive—is a very strong restraint, and has in these days erected for itself a tribunal from which to act the censor, and to exercise an irresponsible discipline. The worship of men, self-worship, world-worship, all conspire to keep up the semblance of Christian obedience. Civilisation is an extensive refiner of outward manners. It purifies, at least, the language of men, while their thoughts are all the while uncleansed. It establishes higher standards of moral judgment, and gives a tone to private life, and to the spirit of laws and tribunals, and to the proceedings of commutative justice. Custom also is a powerful support of the better habits passively received in childhood.

Men float as upon a stream, buoyed up, passive, and inert. And intellect has a vast and versatile power of putting on the appearance not only of religion, but even of high sanctity. It is hard to believe that a man is not what he is able both powerfully and persuasively to describe. And what is true of individuals is true also of societies. A civilised Christian state has a thousand agencies to assist in supporting the belief of its own religious character; and the Christian tradition of eighteen hundred years yet floats on. This is a danger to which we are specially exposed at this time. The powers of the world, though professing to be Christian, have grown weary of Christ's yoke, and are divorcing themselves, one by one, from Him. We have new ideas, new theories, new forces at work. Education now is the regenerator of individuals; and civilisation is the modern city of God. We hear of individual and social development; individual and social progress; of the destiny of mankind, and of the golden age yet to come, when all shall be loyal, moral, intellectual; Christian, but not sectarian; religious, though unable to unite; one with God, though divided from each other. But we seem to forget that, for the development of individual perfection, there is needed a principle above nature; and for the development of society, an unity above national institutions. In what does

Christianity differ from philosophy on the one hand, but in revealing to us the regeneration of the Spirit; and from Judaism on the other, but in absorbing all nations into the unity of the Church? The true and only fruitful principle of education is the gift of our spiritual birth; the mightiest power of national development and progress is subjection to the city of God. But if we will invert these things, we simply adopt the principle of philosophical education, and a Judaic nationality. In these days, when Christian realities are fast passing away, Christian terms are still retained; but they are retained only to be transferred to shadows. We hear on all sides of unity and regeneration; but the spiritual laws of the heavenly city are out of date. In modern civilisation they are, if not formally rescinded, cast aside as obsolete. The powers of the world need something more akin to themselves than a "conversation in heaven;" and to uphold their religious contradictions, they must find a higher unity than the Church of Christ.

All these things engender a specious outward Christianity, which descends from age to age, on the surface of nations and households, and under it there is often no fellowship with the world unseen; no living hold of the Head, which is our Lord Jesus Christ. This is our peril now. Laxity,

indifference, false theories of charity, fear of being derided for narrowness, or of being assailed for tenacity, make men shrink from their heavenly allegiance. They try to make it chime with the policy of the world. And where these clash, the world has its will, because it is near and imposing: the Faith must give way, because the city of God is silent, abiding its time in heaven. Deep-working evils eat out the heart of such a Christianity, whether in nations or individuals. Vain-glory, worldly greatness, luxury, softness, traffic and barter, wealth and selfishness,—these make men and empires to be secret and stubborn enemies of the Cross and kingdom of Christ. Its realities are hateful, because sharp and rebuking. Worldliness, follies, and pleasures, with the lusts which are never far apart from them, turn the whole heart from God. St. Paul says of all such, "who mind earthly things," that is, they buy and sell, and grow fond of their gains; ever busy, ever full of thought and care, policy and scheming. They live among earthly things, till they catch their taint, and themselves become earthly. And all these, and they with them, must "perish with the using."

Such men may be known by this—they never forego any thing for the sake of Christ; gain, honour, place, ease, pleasure, and the like. When

the trial comes, they choose the world; and sell their Master for thirty pieces of silver, or for a bauble, or for the gambling hope of wealth—for an ambitious dream; whereby we may know that they are none of His.

3. Lastly, we may learn, that there may be living and habitual conversation in heaven, under the aspect of the most simple, ordinary life. For on what does it depend but on these two things, on faith, which keeps alive the consciousness,—or, if I may so say, the vision of the city of God,—and on the obedience of our heart to its laws of love? And what are faith and obedience but realities of the Spirit, which all who desire may attain?

The greatest mysteries of Christ's kingdom, like the highest laws of creation, are the broadest and largest in their range. The communion of saints, the consciousness of Christ's presence, and of our fellowship with all who are united with Him, is an article of our Baptismal faith; and may be, therefore, universal. It is not the intellectual and the contemplative, the retired and highly favoured, alone, who may converse with the heavenly city, and have fellowship with all who dwell in it. We live too little in the presence of the world unseen. Even religious minds are too little conscious of it. If some high mountain rose above our dwelling, we should never pass our

threshold, or look abroad, without seeing it. The first lights of the morning would fall upon it; the last glow of evening would redden it; all day long the sun's heat would burn upon it; all our distances would be measured, all our paths guided by it. Such to the eyes of faith is the Mount Zion which is in heaven. It hangs over us, and we dwell upon its base. If only our eyes were open, as those of Elisha's servant in Dothan, we should be more conscious of our heavenly fellowship than of our earthly friends. With them would be our true home; the only world of reality; our only abiding rest. This would be the universal consolation of every member of Christ; the secret stay of souls under the burden of this weary world. Wheresoever we be, we may look upward, and see "Jerusalem which is above," "the mother of us all." When we kneel down, it, as it were, descends, and we enter into it; we pass through its open gates, and fall down even before the presence of the King. But at all times, even the busiest, and in all lawful ways, even the most crowded by the world, we are still within its shelter and its sphere. A holy life is its very gate. And let us always remember that holiness does not consist in doing uncommon things, but in doing every thing with purity of heart. It is made up of relative duties and of habitual devotion. Such

works of faith, patience, and charity, as our life admits, even to the very lowest state may be sanctified. Some of the greatest saints of God have been formed in the humblest paths of life, in private homes; as Anna, and Simeon, and in all ages of the Church; for secret fellowship with God is the source of all sanctity. The world soon wears out and withers up the soul which is familiar with its works, but a stranger to the Divine presence. If we do not converse with God in daily worship, we shall soon be swallowed up by the attractions of this earthly state. In the temptations of the world there is this special danger, that they are incessant. There is no moment when they are not upon us. Like the law of gravitation, which universally takes effect wheresoever it is not kept out by a special counteraction, so it is with the cares, pleasures, labours, anxieties of life. Nothing but fellowship with God keeps them in check. The moment we relax, they resume their power. The earth is nearer to us than the heavenly city; and all our affinities are more with earth than heaven. We need, therefore, something more than general intentions, and general habits of religion, to keep ourselves stedfast to our true home. We need some special and definite rules; such, for instance, as a careful reminding of ourselves, every morning, of the peculiar dangers of our calling in

life, and of the particular sins to which we are most inclined; with a prayer that God will keep us all day long, by His Spirit, from tempting ourselves. At night, again, we ought to review the day, and see in what we have fallen, praying His forgiveness. And this habit of watchfulness needs two great supports,—the one, a daily recollection of the city of God, and the other, an habitual consciousness of God's presence. And these, again, run up into the true sources of all spiritual strength, which are frequent communion—as often as, if possible not less than, once a month—and persevering prayer. If we will watchfully and patiently walk by this path, then no matter where we be: in the throng and turmoil of great cities, in the crowded ways of life, you may live as citizens of heaven. There need be no affected singularity of gait or speech, nothing outwardly unlike the busy world around you; though you be all estranged within. It is a blessed thought, that no lawful state is a bar to any aspiration, to any reward in the kingdom of God. Our desires may go up direct from the thickest entanglements of life, to the throne before which ascend the prayers of saints. In the midst of this evil world, "the Lord knoweth them that are His." They are lifted up, as it were, out of time, and have their lot among those who are already partakers of eternity.

They go in and out of the heavenly gates, which are open evermore: for "the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day," and "there shall be no night there." Little as we often think it, there are at our side those who shall be high in the city of God. Many that are slighted and despised,—many that now seem afar off,—are ripening to be saints. At that day "many that are first shall be last, and the last first:" "they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south," from all lands, and from all ages, from all ways and paths of life, "and shall sit down in the kingdom of God."[1] Be this our prayer, our lot, our rest for ever.

[1] St. Luke xiii. 29.

SERMON XI.

THE CROSS THE MEASURE OF SIN.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 18.

"Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."

ST. PAUL is here speaking neither of Jews nor of heathens, but of Christians. These enemies of the Cross were not blasphemers or persecutors of the Lord of glory, but baptized sinners: men who bore the sign and name of Christ; but by their sins crucified the Son of God afresh unto themselves. They were partly false apostles, who began even then to divide the Church: men of unsound doctrine and of impure life; together with those who followed them: they were partly also the sinful members of the Philippian Church, who had fallen from their first faith, and lived in the lusts of the world and of the flesh, still professing Christianity. No doubt, St. Paul is speak-

ing of gross sinners, but not of gross sinners only. He here lays down a principle, which applies to all sin, of every kind and of every measure, whether great or small. He says of such men, that "they are enemies of the Cross of Christ." This is the special guilt of sin in Christians. Let us, therefore, see more fully what he means. He does not mean, that sinful Christians, openly and in words, deny or blaspheme the Gospel; nor that they use force to persecute the Church and body of Christ. For it often happens that Christians, as they go deeper in sin, all the more profess faith in the freeness of God's grace, the fulness of Christ's forgiveness, the perfection of His one sacrifice, the sufficiency of His atonement: that is, they become Antinomian; and all the more boast of faith in words, as they are enemies of the Christ in deed and in truth.

How is it, then, that every sin, even the very least, makes men enemies of the Cross of Christ?

1. First, because it was sin, that, so to speak, created the Cross; sin made a Redeemer necessary. It opened some deep breach in the order of life and in the unity of God's kingdom, which could be no way healed but by the atonement. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men:"—a new dominion was set up, where, before, God reigned

alone. Out of the abyss of the eternal world arose up some awful power, some strong necessity—the antagonist of God. One act of one man, the disobedience of one will, called up a whole world of rebellion, and let in all the powers of death upon the works of God. When we speak of these things, we speak of what we cannot understand. The depth is too dark for us. The voice which issues out of the eternal throne has said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;" "The wages of sin is death;" "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is all we can know until we are beyond the grave. Then, it may be, the powers of death will be revealed to those over whom it has no more dominion. For the present time, it is enough to know, that there could be no life in the world, when fallen, except by the atonement of the Son of God. And He, of His free choice and eternal love, gave Himself to die in our behalf. The Cross broke through these absolute and awful necessities, and henceforth "death and hell" are "cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death."[1] Here we may see the enmity of sin. If there had been no sin in the world until now, the sin we have committed, each one of us, this day would have demanded the sacrifice of reconciliation. Such is the intensity of one offence;

[1] Rev. xx. 15.

such its infinity of guilt. We may say, one by one, "Though there had been no sinner upon earth but myself, I should have created the necessity which nailed the Son of God upon the Tree. Though sufficient to redeem all the world, yet nothing less than His blood could redeem me alone. Infinite in price, His death is needed to blot out my sin alone, which is infinite in guilt."

2. And, again, not only does sin both create and multiply this necessity, but, so to speak, it continues to frustrate the work of the Cross and Passion of the Son of God. It demands His death, and it defeats its virtues: it invokes it from the mercies of God, and it wars against it by direct hostility: it first makes it necessary, and then would make it fruitless.

For the blood of the Son of God was shed to blot out the sin of the world; but sin blots out again, from the soul that commits it, the blood of sprinkling "wherewith it was sanctified." It plucks away, one by one, the souls for whom Christ died; and gives the key to those fearful words, "Many are called, but *few* are chosen." "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it."[1] This is a mystery we can only refer to the mystery of the fall and to the origin of evil. The Lamb of God

[1] St. Matt. vii. 14.

hath taken away the sin of the world, yet the elect alone are saved; and "the whole world lieth in wickedness." In every soul, sin is still striving to tear it away from the life to which through the Cross it is united. In every one of us this whole mystery is at work: Michael and his angels fighting against the devil and his angels: a fearful conflict between spiritual hosts contending for our eternal destiny. And in all the earth the same warfare is renewed: the world wrestling against the Church, and, worst of all, the regenerate, who have made themselves again servants of sin, against the spirit of their regeneration which is given to us by our crucified Redeemer.

3. And, once more, sin makes men enemies of the Cross, because it is, in virtue and spirit, a renewal of the crucifixion. Therefore St. Paul says, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."[1] It acts the crucifixion over again. And therefore our Lord, though He was already in the bliss and glory of the

[1] Heb. vi. 4-6.

Father, cried, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" In like manner to every one of us He stretches forth His pierced hands, and saith, "See what I bare for thee, and woundest thou Me again?" St. John also writes, "Behold He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."[1] He does not only mean Pilate and Herod, the priests and His crucifiers on Mount Calvary, but all sinners, both before and since His Passion; the whole conspiracy of sinful and rebellious wills, by whom He has been betrayed and bound, buffeted and wounded, from the beginning until His coming again. In truth, it was not the hammer and the nails which crucified Him; nor the Roman soldiers who wielded the weapons of His Passion; nor the arm and the hand which smote the sharp iron into the wood—these were but the blind material instruments of His agony. His true crucifiers were our sins,—and we, ourselves—the sinners, for whom He died. This was the real power of darkness which set in motion all the array of death. Wilful sins renew, in virtue and by implication, the wounds that were suffered on Mount Calvary. And this reveals in us the true depth and measure of our guilt. By our offences we not only create the necessity for an atonement while

[1] Rev. i. 7.

we frustrate its effects, but we wound Him again, who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. The chief guilt of sin is its ingratitude — the unthankfulness of heart which endures to act over again the Passion of our Redeemer. The very instincts of nature would shrink from such unfeeling hardness. Let us but put it to ourselves: let us call to mind the sufferings of any one whom we have loved and tended in pain: the sights and the sounds of those dark hours in which we saw them bowing under the burden of mortal agony, — all these things are fixed in our souls as thorns which can never be plucked out. Every remembrance of them pierces to the quick: even sudden and transient recollections thrill through us. The visions of sorrow, which a tone or a strain of music, or the first lights of morning waken in our memories, break up fountains of tears, and make our hearts to flow with emotion. Would we bring all these back again? Would we renew all these sorrows and pains once more? Do our hearts so much as willingly consent to the mere passing thought of their enduring afresh the last struggles of distress? Would you slight their known desire? Would you do what they forbade, or looked upon, even in silence, with sad and loving reproof? And yet, when we sin, what else do we towards Him who for us hung upon the Cross?

The ingratitude of our sin renews, so far as can be, the very act of crucifixion. It is, then, no mere figure of speech, but a very deep and appalling reality, that sin makes every soul that wilfully offends an enemy of the Cross of Christ, by converting it into a direct spiritual antagonist of the will and intent of our merciful Lord in the mystery of His Passion. And yet how little do we lay this to heart. Therefore, we shall do well to go somewhat into detail, and to bring this subject to bear upon the particulars of our life.

1. Hence we may see, first, the exceeding sinfulness of every single act of wilful sin. We deceive ourselves by dealing with our sins in a heap. If we would weigh them by a just measure, we must treat them singly. Each one, taken alone, contains the whole principle of rebellion against God, and is united to the necessity of the crucifixion. Our whole will, that is, our whole moral power and being, is in every deliberate act. We all acknowledge this in the greater sins, such as bloodshed, blasphemy, hypocrisy, and the like. Of these there is no question. But what was the sin by which the world fell, and mankind died upon the earth? Was that first transgression, according to the measures which men have invented for the Eternal Judge, a great sin or a small? Was it a sin of the spirit or of the flesh?—a refined

or a gross sin?—a sin implying corruption of the heart, or consistent with purity, and the benevolence in which men place their perfection? What was that sin in its life and reality? It was a willing variance with the will of God; a consent of the heart to what God had forbidden. And what, then, is pride, vanity, anger, worldliness, self-love, ill-temper, falsehood, insincerity? What are these, of which men make such little count? Are they not, every one, as they are committed, even in single acts, sins of a high and guilty character? Is not every consent of the will to sin, a deliberate participation in the wilful rebellion against the will of God, which pierced the Son of God? Shall we say, "I did not think of this?" Can we say in the day of His coming, "Lord, I did not *know*, or I did not *remember*, or I did not *intend*," and the like? Will He not answer, "And why did you not think and remember? Was it as hard to remember the Cross for My sake, as it was to die upon it for yours? Will you clear yourselves by pleading insensibility? To be forgetful of My agony, is it not to be ungrateful? And in a redeemed soul what sin is greater?" Shall we, then, dare to say now what we shall not dare to plead at that day? No; let us believe it: the Cross is the only true measure of our sin. Let us not weigh

it in the false balances of sinners, or by the double weights of our own self-love. Let us try it by this true and only measure. The sins of our whole life, —manhood, youth, and childhood,—we must bring them, one by one, to the foot of the Cross, and there learn their true meaning, which is nothing less than the death and passion of our Lord.

2. Another practical truth we may learn is, the sinfulness of every habitual state or temper of mind contrary to the spirit of our Saviour.

I have hitherto spoken of acts, in which the consent of the will is given. There is a still more subtil danger which besets us. When a man's conscience is awakened, he leaves off by degrees his outward acts of sin. And yet the inward sins of the spirit are often fondly cherished in secret. A great amount of concealed mental sinfulness may lie hid under a life which is outwardly without blame. The soul may consent to itself in its own images and thoughts of evil: and so keep up the virulence of sin, though never suffered to betray itself in acts.

This needs but little illustration; at least in some of its chief forms. There are, however, a few examples we may take, not without advantage. For instance, how common a sin is secret pride. It may seldom betray itself, and yet it may be intense. Worldly pride,—whether of birth, rank, riches, or,

what is still more inward and unbending, pride of intellectual power,—is often the true governing spirit of the heart, when least suspected. Pride is, so to speak, too proud to expose itself. It would be offended, if it were to become notorious and censured. It therefore dwells apart, bracing itself up in secret, and giving to all the affections of the soul a high and supercilious tone. What is more at enmity with the spirit of the Cross? Perhaps nothing, unless we except spiritual pride. And this kind of pride, also, shews itself in many ways. Sometimes in the pride of strictness, that is, in rigour of observance and regularity; in a sort of Christian Pharisaism, which leads to want of tenderness, and of condescension towards the weak, penitent, and poor; to uncharitable judgments, and separation from brethren; though this, perhaps, is the least injurious sort of spiritual pride: because it is the most open and visible; the most human and material, if I may so say. There is a far worse kind, which, instead of building itself upon regularity, sets itself up upon disobedience. It does not take a system out of itself for its support; but rears itself upon itself; upon the conceit of its own sufficient strength. It is its own centre and its own foundation. This is the pride which owns no rule of interpretation but its own judgment, or its own private spirit; or, what is more dangerous, its own

supposed illumination. Such spirits make it a point of piety to be superior to legal appointments and carnal ordinances; to Catholic tradition, general councils, the visible Church, the Christian priesthood, the order of Divine worship, the matter of the Holy Sacraments. In a word, they will be found, at last, to own no revelation but their own thoughts of God, no Church but themselves. Little as such people think it, they claim to be inspired; to be prophets, except that their predictions are not verified; to be apostles, except that they neither labour nor suffer for the Gospel of Christ. It may be said, that this is an overcharged picture. Granted that it is a full-length exposure of the spirit which relies upon itself, conforms to the Church as a thing indifferent, and calls the Holy Sacrament an ordinance. But it is the same spirit, differing only in degree. The common forms of it are, of course, fainter and less pronounced. Outward conformity to the order of the Church, arising from custom or private relations, masks this fault in many characters. In them it shews itself chiefly by slighting the grace of God in humbler souls, and by esteeming obedience to the Church, formality; fasting, self-righteousness; and faith, superstition. What fellowship has such a temper with Him who received a sinner's baptism in Jordan, and washed His disciples' feet?

Take, again, the mental sins of levity, personal vanity, frivolous conversation, love of dress, glitter, and festivities. Is not the indulgence of these faults an habitual provocation of that Divine zeal which consumed our Master in the sacrifice of Himself? What was the fervour of His ardent burning love? of His heart all on fire for us? Can we be all lukewarm and languid in return, and be held guiltless? What, then, shall we be, if, through lack of love, we sink into softness, self-indulgence, self-pampering, and love of ourselves; into a delicate self-considering carefulness which fixes all our thoughts upon our own pleasures, comforts, health, happiness, and the like? A love of self is, in truth, the very soul of sin. All sins are but as circles issuing out from this one productive centre, expanding some more and some less widely, inclosing a narrower or a larger field of our spiritual life. And what is such a temper but a deliberate contradiction of the Cross and character of Him who "pleased not Himself;"[1] who "gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair:"[2] and when He could give no more, "through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God."[3] Such sins as we now speak of are the more dangerous because they are less gross; because they do not issue in startling acts, but are

[1] Rom. xv. 3. [2] Isaiah l. 6. [3] Heb. ix. 14.

wrought into the state and texture of the mind itself. They have so little that is sensual about them, and are so refined; they are so free from outward transgressions of the second table of the law; they wear so much of the array of light. But, nevertheless, they concentrate themselves with a fatal intensity against the spirit of humiliation; against humility, self-denial, self-abasement, compassion, and love.

To bring this home to our own case: how does our past life appear, seen thus under the light of the crucifixion? How will our sins bear to be measured by this rule? What is the secret temper of our spirit now at this present time? Is it humbled, broken, mortified; or fearless, self-supported, and erect? These are questions we must ask, and answer with sincerity and a godly fear: for they will be asked in the day when we shall see our Redeemer in the judgment. Let us clearly discover now what we must confess at that day. If we be living in a high-minded, selfish, loveless spirit, let us lose no time to lay down the arms of our rebellion at the foot of the Cross; let us there break the weapons of our pride in sunder, and bow down our will beneath His pierced feet.

And, as a part of our submission, let us take two very simple practical rules.

One is: when we are tempted by any approach

of evil, to fix our eyes inwardly upon Him, hanging upon the Cross. Let us then call to mind His five wounds, and His crown of thorns. This will abate our pride, break our will, and cast out our evil thoughts. If the temptation be strong and abiding, keep your eyes upon Him until you are delivered. Look upon Him, as upon the true Serpent of brass, till the fever and the poison of your sin be healed. Go, if you can, into some secret place, and kneel down in His sight; and, there, stay upon your knees till the sting of sin is allayed, and the temptation passed away.

The other rule is: to pray, day by day, that our will may be crucified with Him. This prayer, if we persevere, will, by His grace, slay the enmity that is in us, and make us, not enemies, but lovers of His Cross. St. Paul says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;"[1] and again, he says still more, "I am crucified with Christ."[2] This shall be even our state at last. Happy and blessed are they who are dead to themselves, alive to Him alone. Let us, therefore, pray Him so to unite us to the spirit of His crucifixion, that we may die to sin, to the world, to our own will; to all that flatters, fosters, strengthens the love of ourselves. As in Baptism we were signed with His life-giving sign,

[1] Gal. v. 24. [2] Ib. ii. 20.

and charged to fight manfully under His banner, so let us pray, that in life and in death we may be under the shadow of His Cross. Howsoever He may fulfil this prayer, be not afraid. It may be He will send you sickness, or sorrow, or contradiction of sinners, or suffering of some kind. For your prayer is an appeal to His Passion. He may suffer you to receive the stigmas which the world printed on Him. Be it so. Let come what may, if only we have upon us the marks of our crucified Master at that day when the sign of the Son of Man shall appear, and the angels "shall gather His elect from the four winds of heaven."

SERMON XII.

THE CROSS THE MEASURE OF LOVE.

EPHESIANS iii. 19.

"And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

AFTER three years, spent, day by day, in teaching the faith of the Gospel to the Church in Ephesus, there was still something which St. Paul could not make known. He had declared to them "all the counsel of God."[1] He had taught all that language could utter; all that intellect could receive. But there was something yet to be taught and learned. And this, all apostle as he was, full of the Holy Ghost, rapt into the third heaven, partaker in the secrets of paradise, he could not teach them. Not that he did not know it. He had learned it at mid-day in the way to Damascus, in the solitudes of Arabia, in all the warfare of a

[1] Acts xx. 27.

life of the Cross, now drawing on towards its crown. Yet though he knew it with this energetic fulness, and burned to make it known, it was among those "unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The utterance of man was too narrow for it. Therefore, after he had forced all the power of speech into one word, language failed him for very weakness: he could only approach to what he would say by contradiction, "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." Words cannot express, for words cannot contain it. There can be no utterance of this love by sounds of this outer world of sense. It must be learned inwardly before the throne of God. Apostles preach, but the book of the Spirit has seven seals; and One alone can open them. The science of the saints has but one Teacher, who is both truth and understanding; both language and power: He both reveals, and gives the capacity to learn; He speaks, and Himself opens the ear to hear. This is what St. Paul could not teach—the surpassing love of Christ. He had no language to express; they had no understanding to receive it. To reveal it is the office of Christ Himself; therefore St. Paul commends his flock by prayer to the one great Teacher: that, as he goes on to say, "ye may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may

dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."[1]

This exceeding mystery of love is here shadowed forth in words which suggest the infinite and eternal. St. Paul does not say *what* this is which has breadth, length, depth, and height. It is no object of sight, no created being; something not to be measured by sense, uttered by words, comprehended by understanding. It is uncreate, and therefore Divine; and because Divine, boundless and everlasting. What is this but the love of the Son of God? What is that Divine mystery which St. Paul does not express, the name of which is secret, but the love of the Word made flesh? In this all things find their source. Its breadth covers all mankind; its length is without beginning or end; its depth reaching to the grave; its height dwelling in the Godhead. Or take these words of Himself: He is God; the mystic circle whose centre is every where, and its circumference no where; He is the Son perfect, everlasting, infinite, immense. Or understand them of His Cross: its breadth, the redemption of all the race of Adam; its length, the eternal predestination; its

[1] Ephes. iii. 16-19.

depth, the destruction of death and hell; its height, the beatific vision. Or, if we will so meditate upon it, see in this, His love, election, wisdom, and majesty; or, the perfection of His Mystical Body, the city built four-square, whose length, and breadth, and height, are equal;[1] in charity, patience, faith, and contemplation; or, the gifts of every saintly spirit, love, perseverance, fear, and hope. In whatever way we take these words of wisdom and of wonder, they all return again into the fountain from which they issue,—the Cross of the Son of God, of which the arms, the stem, the head, the foot, are a sacrament of His transcendent love who died thereon for us.

This, then, is that great miracle of the Spirit which the Apostle in vain strove to utter. It was to his speech what the world is to our sight. We can see as far as the horizon, but the world lies all beyond. He spoke all he could, but because it passed all knowledge, it passed all speech; and therefore he could do no more than pray, that He who alone can reveal it, would take up his imperfect work; that when the servant could do no more, the Lord would fulfil the revelation of Himself.

Now let us see what is this Divine language,

[1] Rev. xxii. 16.

and what this Divine capacity, without which the love of Christ can be neither revealed nor known.

1. What is the language in which Christ reveals His love to us, but His Cross and Passion? The love of God for man had been made known from the beginning by manifold revelations: all creation, all the Divine government, all the powers of nature, declared it. To this God added, yet further, promises, visions, miracles, prophecies, benedictions, effusions of grace; the election of patriarchs; the ministry of angels; the tokens of His perpetual care; deliverance from peril and from bondage; a priesthood, and mysteries; seers and prophets; sacraments of blessings yet to come; inspirations of truth; revelations of goodness and beauty, of peace and pardon; the communion of saints in secret with Himself; the growing light and perpetual assurance, even with an oath, of the revelation of His kingdom upon earth;—all these, in nature, providence, and grace, within and without, to the sense and to the soul of man, were as one complex language, uttering the love of God. But even this was not enough for that "which passeth knowledge." Something more personal and articulate —something with more intimate expression, more living, in sympathy, persuasion, and power, was needed still. A speech human, and yet Divine;

co-equal with God, and intelligible to man. And in this Divine language He spoke to mankind, when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The words, deeds, and sufferings of the Son of God are but one act—they make up one whole, one eternal word, by which He speaks to us. This is that secret ineffable, which has breadth, length, depth, and height. From the Annunciation to the Ascension is one continuous unfolding of His love: His humiliation as God, and patience as man; His subjection to authority; His endurance of contradictions; His long-suffering of sinners; all the sorrows of His whole life, and all the anguish of His last passion; His night of agony; the cross which wounded His soul more sharply than the Cross which pierced His body; the scourge and the blinding; the reed of mockery, and the crown of thorns; the burden of the Cross, and the sharpness of Calvary; the gall and the vinegar; the scorn and desolation, and after this the humiliation of death, and the dishonour of the grave: He who bare all this being God, and we for whom He bare it sinners,—this is the only tongue mighty to utter that which is beyond the speech of men and angels.

Let us put it to ourselves in words of this world, speaking as men or as fools. Suppose a friend to come and look on us with a gentle, pitying gaze, and say, "I love thee;" it may be, we

should believe him: it would not cost us much to trust his words of kindness. If he should say, "I will lay down my life for thee;" it may be, we should not believe his words: we might say, "I know you to be good and kind: willing to do much, nay, most things for me." If he should say, "See, then, I have left all that I have for thee. I was rich, I am poor: I was in peace, I am in sorrow; I was in a full home of joy, I am alone; and I am come to put myself between thee and thy death, which, though thou canst not see, is at this hour coming upon thee." If a friend should come and say this, we should believe him according to the measures of his known goodness, and according to the measures of human speech and human self-denial. That is, we should have many doubts, and say to ourselves, How would this be if the trial were really to come? But, suppose the trial were already come, and that, in the hour of our danger, he should, before our eyes, fulfil his words, and give himself to ward off every weapon, and to receive every blow: if we should see in him our own wounds, hear upon him the strokes of our own punishment, and the anguish of our own just condemnation; and, at the last, see him die before us in our stead; how would our hearts almost break with the fulness of our belief in his love and truth; how would every thought and feeling

overflow with sorrow, love, and gratitude. We should rebuke ourselves with bitter reproaches for having ever doubted his word or his love a moment. We should need no more words, pledges, or proofs. Pain, wounds, and death, would have testified; and their witness is overwhelming. The memory, the image, the very name of such a friend would be blessed and sacred for ever. His every look and tone of voice, every remembered expression of wish or will, of guidance or counsel, would be our law: we should be jealous for him as for our own life, and endure no word of slight or coldness to be cast upon him.

What but this is the language with which our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed His love to us? There is only this difference: we have been speaking of a merely human love, but His is divine. When tongues and prophecies, blessings and promises, had done their utmost to reveal the fulness of His eternal love, He came Himself, a child in humility and meekness, a man full of love, grace, gentleness, with works of healing, miracles of mercy; speaking to us through our sight and touch, our sympathies and affections, our needs and our sorrows, our fears and our sins. All the love of God, and all the lowliness of man, united in Him to persuade and win our hearts. On our side were only soils and guilt; on His were agony and

love, patient and enduring: undeserved, yet never cooled; slighted, yet never turned away; tender, pitiful, changeless, and eternal. Nor is this all. There is this further depth of love. Sin bound us by a necessity to die. But no necessity bound Him to redeem us: least of all by a life of sorrow, and a death of agony. The Almighty knows no necessity: He that is Omnipotent cannot be bound. He might have saved us in ways unknown, without number or measure. Other ways would have revealed His wisdom, power, and sovereignty of grace. But none would so reveal His love; none so satiate, or slake the Divine thirst of love, as humiliation and sorrow, passion and the Cross. There was a necessity upon Him, not external, which is impossible, but internal, which is of Himself. The necessity was His own free choice, and that choice was the utterance of love. Divine power and grace sufficed not to reveal it. Therefore He willed that He should die and reveal His love upon the Cross. Here it is written in a mystic character, the fulness of which shall be interpreted in paradise, and yet never fully known.

2. But further, the language of His love is two-fold, both without and within. He not only reveals it by His passion to us, but also by His presence in us. And this is the divine capacity by which alone we can understand it. Therefore

St. Paul prays, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." This does not simply mean, that the knowledge of Christ may dwell in the intellect; but that His Spirit, His very presence by the Spirit, may dwell in their hearts: as he further says, being "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." In this way He speaks to us from within, giving us the capacity to hear what cannot enter by the ear, and to understand what the intellect cannot comprehend. Wherefore when He went up into heaven, He poured out upon the Church the gift of the Holy Ghost, who is the love of the Father and of the Son. And in Him, He who is by visible presence in heaven, returned by spiritual presence into His mystical body. From his glorified manhood, as from a fountain, perpetual effusions of life and love descend upon the Church. By His overflowing gifts of grace the whole Church is born again; and into every soul which puts no bar of sin, the fulness of His grace comes down. This, in one word, is the Spirit of love, creating penitents, saints, and martyrs; revealing to all who are sanctified the mystery of the Cross, both that on which He suffered, and that on which they must hang beside Him—the cross of witness and contradiction, of conflict and death, of patience and sorrow, of sickness and affliction, of temptation and

fiery assaults; and in the midst of all, revealing the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of His love, which is never so full of life and consolation, as when the Cross is sharpest upon their shoulder, and the thorns run deepest on their brow. This mystery of the Cross has been from the beginning the object of contemplation to all His true servants; before He came, under a veil in hope; since He came, openly by faith. It is set up in the centre of the mystical body. Upon it all eyes of penitents and mourners, of contemplative and solitary spirits; and of all who, in the throng of life, the weariness of toil, the cares of home, serve Him in secret, continually dwell. All alike gaze on that sign as their light and healing—as the great eternal mystery of life, reaching to hell and heaven, and gathering all God's elect into its world-wide embrace.

"To comprehend" this "with all saints" is to share in the depth of their spiritual vision, and in the love which love kindles in them; to comprehend the greatness of His love and the greatness of our sin, the two-fold mystery of goodness and of guilt; and to be changed, as we look upon that which is both the shame and the glory of our Lord, "into the same image" of love and patience, "from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." There is, as it were, a precinct within the visible Church, into

which all are called, but few enter. For into this interior presence of Divine love no human teaching can lead; no preaching, not even of apostles; no book, not even inspired; no, not the Epistle to the Church in Ephesus, all kindled as it is with the fire of God; still less can intellect, imagination, or emotion—all these are weak and cold. It is the office of a Divine Person, of Him "who hath the key of David;" He alone can bring us within His holy place; that is, Christ, by His Spirit, revealing His own love to us, by kindling our love to Him, that we, "being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend;" for there is no other sight which sees love but love; love alone can measure love, can perceive, can feel it. He has been teaching us His love by making us love Him. There is no other way. Till we love Him, all is dark. Even the plainest truths seem shadowy and changeful; the highest doctrines of faith appear remote, and above our sphere; the whole mystery of the Incarnation, and of the Cross; of the Resurrection, and the kingdom of Christ; the unity of His Body, and the glory of the saints; the gifts of the Holy Sacraments, and the universal sympathy of the new creation of God,—all these are realities which surpass the intellect, and are comprehended only by love; that is, by the spiritual reason in the light of charity.

This inward and divine work of grace is no special gift of certain Christians, but the common heritage of the regenerate. If we do not possess it, the loss is ours, and the sin; for all our life through, whether we have heard or no, He has been speaking to us by this interior voice; sometimes, perhaps, making our hearts to burn within even when we have not understood, and revealing Himself in clearness when we have ever so little turned to Him in love. Wonderful kingdom of love in the soul of man! Who has not seen its tokens? Who has not perceived its presence? He who is in all His mystical body, is whole in every member; not severed or divided, but full, infinite, divine. In each one His presence is the same, revealing in each what He reveals in all. Though He uses many and various ways, yet He makes all that desire it to know His love; bearing with us in our sin, even after baptism; preventing us by His guidance, preserving us from perils we never knew, restraining us from manifold perdition; opening again the eyes we have wilfully blinded, and the ears we have closed in obstinacy; restoring, as by miracles of love, the spiritual gifts we have abused; converting us to Himself. Whensoever we have turned or inclined towards Him, He has revealed Himself, waiting to be gracious, overwhelming us with a consciousness of tender care,

and of love that nothing can estrange. In this way He deals with us, that He may root us and ground us in love. When the soul is once kindled with this divine flame, and the sins of flesh and spirit begin to consume away in the fire of His presence, it is as if scales had dropped from our spiritual sight, and the Cross stands visible, bearing the mystery of love. Then all things change their aspect. New lights fall from it on every side. At first they come in strange contradictions, greater joys and greater sorrows, livelier hopes and more trembling fears. After a while the repentance of alarm relaxes into the contrition of a broken spirit, and the rigour of conscience into the tenderness of compunction. Then the whole inward life is turned back upon its true source, and lives by looking upon the Cross. The kingdom of Christ, both in earth and heaven, is then revealed from its true point of sight; that is, from Christ's presence in a loving heart. It is then seen in its divine unity and perfection, reigning with Him, and suffering, loving, sympathising, interceding, and worshipping; sustained by one life, one bread, one altar, one sacrifice; cleaving to one Cross, quickened by one Spirit, united by one bond of love, holy and universal, under one High Priest, who is at the right hand of God. O "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height"—"the love of

Christ, which passeth knowledge!" which can be uttered only by the Passion of the Word made flesh, and revealed in us only by the indwelling of Christ Himself. O divine mystery! and language equally divine; ineffable gift of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, ever with us in the Presence of the Eternal Spirit, Himself "the First and the Last," the Truth and the Teacher, the Light which reveals itself, "the bright and morning Star."[1]

But to whom does He reveal this surpassing love? Are they not chiefly these?

1. First, those who have faithfully obeyed the grace of their regeneration. In them the spiritual life takes the lead and guidance of their whole intellectual and moral being, going before it and leading it in the way of purity and love. They are sheltered from the soils and stains which pierce the souls of such as fall into disobedience; they are never clouded by the dimness and darkness which gather upon a rebellious and uneasy conscience. Their union with Christ is a source of inward light, which sheds abroad a fuller radiance as they grow in love. A sanctified will is in them the root of the illuminated reason. By purity of heart they see the Cross, even in childhood, according to its measures; in youth and in

[1] Rev. xxii. 16.

the full ripeness of age, with a continual expanse of light filling the whole field of contemplation: —there they behold the signet of love, the law of their will, the purification of their heart, the flame at which their love is kindled, the life of all their soul. Such Christians are in many ways children of light; all brightness within, and like the light, silent, soft, and noiseless; so that this loud busy world takes them for weak and stagnant, without vividness or energy. What the world admires is the visible and audible piety of converts. It cannot conceive a life so tranquil to be fervent; as if the zeal of penitents were more perfect than the ministry of angels. So truly is "the secret of the Lord with them that fear Him;" so hidden is that new name which is known only to him that receiveth it. To those who have been thus signally blessed of God, through the watchfulness and prayer of parents, or sometimes, so far as we can see, even without these secondary agencies, and have been kept within the light of that gift which by nature they could not have—to them what things others learn late and with toil, and, after all, for the most part, with less clear perceptions, are as original truths, axioms of the regeneration, instincts of their spiritual nature. They are unclouded and unchilled, and have a clear transparent purity of heart, quickened by a consciousness of the pre-

sence and love of Christ, which neither intellect nor speech can conceive. It is as a part of their own being; it sustains the unity of their own life, derived through the Spirit from Him who is their life. They live more and more in the habitual consciousness of His love to them. The world cannot draw them from Him. It has no sweetness like fellowship with Him; no brightness like the light of His countenance; no fairness like the beauty of His presence. They rest all their weight on Him in loving, confiding trust; and look on without fear to the day of death, as the way that leads, it may be through a narrow and rough pass, but speedy and sure, to the fulness of His love unveiled.

2. And besides these, who are blessed above all, there are others also who are specially strengthened to comprehend with all saints the surpassing love of the Cross; such are all who habitually and devoutly communicate in the sacrament of His passion. Nothing so visibly reveals the Cross to us; nothing so renews before our eyes the language of divine acts and sufferings, by which He has revealed His love. It represents to us the mystery of His humiliation, His incarnation, His self-oblation, His crucifixion, the rending of His body, the shedding of His blood, the whole mystery of His passion. These are set before our very sight. He

is lifted up visibly before us. And what is so represented to us from without by symbols, is applied to us within by His intimate presence. He makes every devout soul to partake of Himself, to share that love which nailed Him upon the Cross; to share even the Cross, by sharing His love. He makes over to us His atonement and His priceless blood, the infinite merits of His incarnation; and with them His Spirit and His charity. But of these things it is hard to speak in words. They are of that secret which passeth knowledge; which can be comprehended only in the spiritual light by which He reveals Himself at the altar, high and lifted up upon the Cross, radiant with love; then higher still in the throne of God, angels ascending and descending in the ministries of His compassion; and highest of all, in the midst of His heavenly court, ranged around Him in the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of the eternal glory. These things are only for the inward utterance, which is spiritual and silent; heard always in the still tones of a voice divine, by those who are meet for the heavenly feast. The more meet, the more clear their spiritual sense; and the oftener they feed with devotion on the living bread, the meeter they become. This is the point or centre of light in which obedience, purity of heart, prayer, contemplation, faith, all

conspire in one; and here He vouchsafes to come down, as it were, to meet the aspirations of His own Spirit in us, and to reveal the eternal love which is Himself.

3. And, lastly, there are, blessed be His mercy, others among whom we may hope to have our lot. If it were only to spirits of love and spirits of knowledge, such as we have spoken of, that the Cross were revealed, where should we have our portion? But here again is the wonderful mystery of His compassion; what the highest attain by grace, is by gift granted to the lowest. In this the first and the last are all alike. It is not only to purified and devout hearts, but also to penitent and broken spirits, that He reveals His Cross: to all who after their sins, whatsoever their past life has been, are now truly and sadly repenting. "There stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene."[1] A blessed company: One all pure, that had borne Him in her bosom as a child; one all love, who had lain upon His breast at supper; and one all sorrow, who had pierced Him with her sins. Once they were "not all clean," but all were clean then; for the Cross had cleansed them all as white as snow. Blessed and healing type of the great grace of repentance; the renewal

[1] St. John xix. 25.

of the new creature, the all but second birth of the regenerate. "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." The pure in heart see God with a speed and depth of sight which seems given to none beside: but to penitents, even in their tears, is granted an intensity of vision which seems to outstrip all others; yet with what strange intimations of a manifold and diverse perfection. John, in the zeal of love, outran Peter to the grave; but Peter entered first, while John only stooped and looked into the tomb. John first knew the Lord upon the shore, but Peter first hastened to His presence. Love outstripped repentance, and repentance left love behind. Repentance was bid to follow, and love was left to linger without a token of His will. Yet neither was before or after other; for both saw Him, and were full. So it is now. If we be broken in heart: not filled with a clouded and moody self-contemplation, or with a shrinking, unhoping fear, still less with a lukewarm and variable temper, wavering between sin and penitence, but with a loving sorrow; if we have a heart pierced fivefold, bleeding inwardly, issuing in patience, humility, gentleness, trust, and hope; even to us He will reveal His Cross in all the fulness of its perfection, in pardon, in long-suffering love, and in life eternal.

But let us take great heed, lest we try to ascend the height before we have gone down into the depth of His passion. Let us, as penitents, beware how we think to comprehend it by spiritual strength and intuition, by high devotions, and sensible affections of love and ardour. We shall but turn our heads, and fall from the ascents which are not for us to climb. Our way to the Cross is below, in humiliation and abasement, in conscious poverty of all strength and of all attainments of a devout life. Our path will be safest in shadows and silence ; loving the lowest place ; and gladly enduring slights, especially when undeserved, as most nearly likening us to Him in His shame. Penitents have need to watch, lest they grow to be strict, cold, upright, blameless, indignant at sinners, unconscious of themselves. Our only hope is to be abased, and kindled with indignation against ourselves, absorbed in the thought of our Blessed Lord, if so be we may be like her whose whole soul flowed with a living stream in the kiss with which she embraced His sacred feet.

This shall reveal all we need to see ; and all the changes of life will receive new and unforeseen lights cast upon them from the Cross. Blessings, rebukes, sharp checks, chastisements, and a lowering to-morrow, will all bring out some new aspect of His personal love to us. The deeper we go

down into the depths of sorrow for our sin, the more will He reveal the Great Sorrow by which our sin was taken away: and the fellowship of sorrow is the fellowship of love; for without love sorrow is not repentance, and without sorrow love dies. These two are united in the Cross. In its unity they fulfilled His passion; they are now the fountains of our repentance.

What but this Love, when sorrow is passed away, shall be the bliss of the redeemed in heaven? What but this shall be the song of the blessed before the Lamb which was slain, when the sealed book is opened; and every one, with harps and golden vials full of odours, shall fall down and sing a new song, "saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood."[1] It is still and evermore the same hymn of praise, the Cross and the love of the eternal Son, there seen in all its expanse unveiled; and with a perfect capacity of sight, by the vision of uncreated light, where each one shall be more blessed, the more deeply he beholds it. But, for us now, we must begin upon the lowest step, with sorrow for the sin of an unloving heart. Hereafter we shall know, even as we are known; nothing shall pass know-

[1] Rev. v. 9.

ledge then, when all shall be taught of God. For this we must wait His time and will. Let us now make sure, if by His grace we may, of the first and lowest elements of this science of all saints. As yet our sin passeth knowledge. Let us learn this first. This is enough for us on earth; and then, when we have learned to know this in a life of compunction, we shall hereafter know the love of Christ without measure in the fulness of eternal peace.

SERMON XIII.

A LIFE OF PRAYER A LIFE OF PEACE.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4, 5, 6.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

ST. PAUL, in these words, bids the Christians in Philippi to carry all their sorrows and fears to the throne of Christ. He specially bids them remember the nearness of our Lord; and the freedom we may use in speaking with Him. And in so doing he has taught us a great and blessed truth, needful for all men in all ages: I mean, that a life of prayer is a life of peace. It is not in times of persecution only, but at all times,

that the presence and fellowship of Christ are the peace and consolation of the Church. We are born into a world of perturbations; we carry them in our own heart. The world is the counterpart of man's fallen nature, turbulent, restless, and distracted. Every man gives in his contribution of disquietude; and the life of most men is made up of cares and doubts, perplexities and forebodings, of fruitless regrets for follies past, and of exaggerated thoughts of trials yet to come. On men who live without God in the world these things press sorely. They fret and wear them without alleviation. This is the "sorrow of the world" that "worketh death." It is a bitter and embittering disquiet of heart. The plague of evil thoughts, inordinate cravings, disappointments and losses, vain hopes and wearing fears, these are by nature the portion of us all. Even religious people have their yoke of cares. But there is this difference between them and others; they know where to carry the recital of their troubles, where to lay down their burden, and Who will bear their griefs and take away their sorrows.

1. St. Paul here tells us, first of all, that there is One, ever near us, who can fulfil all our desire, and over-rule all things in our behalf. "The Lord is at hand." How soon He may reveal Himself in person we know not; but soon or late, it is cer-

tain, that although unseen, He is ever near us. His presence departed not from the Church when He ascended into heaven. He is withdrawn from the eyes of our flesh; but in the sight of our hearts He is always visible. Though He be at the right hand of God, yet He is in the Church, and in our secret chamber. Though He is the Lord of heaven and earth, yet He is ever in the midst of us, watching and guiding, disposing all things for the perfection of His kingdom, and, in it, of each one of us. He is both able and willing to fulfil all our hearts' desires; and nothing is hid from His sight. He knows all; even our most unuttered thoughts, our most concealed desires; and with this assurance we might lay aside all our burdens. It might seem enough for us simply to cast all our care on Him, knowing that He careth for us; to refer ourselves to His love and wisdom, to His all-comprehending knowledge of our wishes and our wants. This would be a sure and sufficient pledge against all the evils we forebode and shrink from. But there is a relief in speaking out our wishes; and even this He does not deny us.

2. Therefore St. Paul tells us further, that we may make all our desires known unto God. We may speak with Him as a man speaks with his friend. We all know the relief, as we say, of unburdening ourselves, and opening our hidden cares,

even to an earthly companion. We seem to have laid off a weight when we have told our sorrow. When any one we love shares our anxiety, and divides our forebodings with us, we seem to have either only half the burden, or a twofold strength to bear it. We feel this relief all the more, in the measure in which our friend is wise and compassionate, loved by us, and loves us in return. And yet there is a point beyond which we do not reveal ourselves to our fastest and nearest friend. There is something of imperfection still in them that makes us lay bare only one side, and lay open only one chamber of our heart. There is always something still concealed, some reserved infirmity, something over which we must needs draw a veil and silence; which we would not that any fellow-creature should discern; which we can only shew to the world unseen, and to the eyes of Him "that searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins." But with Him, not only is it impossible to conceal, but we do not desire to hide any thing from His sight. Though He be the Holy One of God, and "His eyes as a flame of fire," so piercing and so pure, yet we do not shrink from making all known to Him: for though He be perfect in purity, He is likewise perfect in compassion: He is as pitiful as He is holy. We may come before Him, and say, "This have I done, and this have I left undone. I am sin-

ful and unhappy, beset by temptations, harassed by myself." We may make known the facts and particulars of our trial, its circumstances and details; and plead, as it were, against ourselves, praying to be delivered from the power of sin which still dwells in us, and draws us aside into darkness and transgression; overclouding our heart by imaginations and visions of evil. We may say, "Thou knowest *what* I cannot speak, and *why* I cannot. Thou knowest all things."

When we are overcome by a sense of what we are, and for shame or sorrow even fear to speak at all, we may place ourselves before Him, passively, and in silence, casting ourselves down under His feet, to be read, searched by His penetrating sight. Though unworthy to ask the least, yet we may make our requests known unto Him by silent humiliation, and by secret appeal to His perfect knowledge.

Now, this is what St. Paul bids us to do. "Be careful for *nothing;* but in *every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." And the promise is, not that we shall have whatsoever we may ask, but that we shall have *peace*. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We shall not, indeed, always have what

we ask; but if we ask in faith, we shall always have peace. Of this we shall never fail.

1. First, because whatsoever we ask which is truly for our good, that He will give us freely. No father so much delights to give the very thing his children ask for, as our Father in heaven. It is well-pleasing in His sight both that we should know what to pray for as we ought, and that He should bestow the thing we ask. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you."[1] But it is a high grace to know what things to ask in the name of Christ. Men make strange prayers to Heaven, and couple the Name at which every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, with foolish and unreasonable prayers. Whatsoever we desire that is in harmony with the Eternal will, with the love of our Redeemer, and with the mind of the Holy Ghost, those things we shall without fail receive. All good things; all good, eternal and created; all blessing, grace, and truth; all the benedictions of the kingdom of God; all the promises of the Gospel, and all the pledged mercies of redemption; all these we may ask importunately, and shall assuredly receive. Even things of this life—solace and deliverance, the reversal of threatened chastisement, the restoration of blessings half

[1] St. John xvi. 23.

withdrawn; these too, and a multitude of mercies infinite as the changes and chances of man's life, we may lawfully desire. It may be we shall also receive these very things we ask for. At all events, we may make "our requests known unto God:" leaving with Him to open and to shut His hand as He shall see best for us.

2. For whatsoever we ask which is not for our good, He will keep it back from us. And surely in this there is no less of love than in the granting what we desire as we ought. "What man of you that is a father, if his son ask for bread, will he give him a stone?" And if he ask for poison, will he not refuse it? Will not the same love which prompts you to give a good, prompt you to keep back an evil, thing? If, in our blindness, not knowing what to ask, we pray for things which should turn in our hands to sorrow and death, will not our Father, out of His very love, deny us? In this entangled twilight state of probation, where the confines of good and ill so nearly approach, and almost seem to intermingle, there needs a keen and strong spiritual eye to discern and know the nature and properties of all things which encompass us about. They allure us, and we desire them, and ask not knowing for what. How awful would be our lot, if our wishes should straightway pass into realities; if we were endowed with

a power to bring about all that we desire; if the inclinations of our will were followed by fulfilment of our hasty wishes, and sudden longings were always granted. Such a power in an imperfect being, drawn aside, as we are, by the solicitations of evil from without, and hurried away by impulses of an imperfect and variable heart within, would be an intolerable misery. And yet what but this would it be, if all our prayers were granted—if there were no all-wise, all-holy One to review our imperfect choices, to sift out the poisons, and to keep back the sorrows which we have ignorantly prayed for?

In the commonest things of this world, how valuable is the counsel of a wise and trusty friend, who revises and checks our aims and plans. From what unnumbered errors and falls are we preserved by taking counsel of some tried and discerning adviser. How, on the retrospect of years, we see whole trains of evil consequences lying hid behind some act we were once vehemently bent on taking; from which we were hardly turned aside at the very moment of action. In like manner, what a current of happy and prosperous events has carried us along, as we now can see, since the day when some decision was made at the guidance of another, to whose advice we could hardly be brought, at that time, to consent. And what but this loving care, if it may be reverently spoken, is

ever taken for us in heaven? Our vehement, blind, tumultuous hearts are continually sending up their wishes and prayers on high, all mingled and infected with our own earthliness. In the golden censer of our great High Priest they are purged by the living fire of His love; the evil separated from the good, and our rash and wayward choices refined till they unite with the wisdom and will of our Eternal Father. One day we shall bless Him, not more for what He has granted than for what He has denied. Though now we think our most needful requests are put aside, we shall then perceive the real meaning of what we asked, and the rashness of our prayer. Alas for us, if all our prayers should be given us: if the meting out and tempering of our own lot were thus left in our own hands; if all we desire were made our own; if the windows of heaven were never shut against us. He gave them their desire, and "sent leanness withal into their soul."[1] Alas, if health, prosperity, prolonged enjoyment of the bright things of life, and freedom from sorrows and deprivations, were continued to us as long as we desire; if the wholesome sharpness of pain, bodily humiliation, the breaking up of hopes, and the over-clouding of our happiness, were kept back as long as we should pre-

[1] Ps. cvi. 15.

scribe. Ours would be a blind discipline of healing for sinful hearts. We should be poor physicians of our own maladies. And this is the reason why our Father in heaven uses a loving severity, and at times confounds our wishes with the strokes of His hand. He denies us what we ask, and sends instead what we most recoil from. We ask for bright lights, and He sends us shadows; we crave for soft things, and He sends us hardness for our portion; we pray Him to take away our anxieties, and He turns them into present sorrows; we ask for the allaying of some instant pain, and He sends us a double share; we desire to be free from chastisement, and He besets us on all sides with His correction; we beseech Him to heal some friend over whom we watch in trembling, or to give back to us one that already hangs between life and death, and He seems to read all our prayers backward, and to answer us by contradictions. Yet in all this, what is there but the order and harmony of the wisdom and the will of God? The confusion and perplexity is all our own. It is not that He contradicts our will, but we are contradicting His. We cross Him, not He us. We would be reigning in His kingdom, and making His sway to follow our choice. We would be the granters of our own petitions—make our will the law of His dealings with us. But He has His

own purpose in all refusals; a purpose deeper than we can reach. It was an apostle and a martyr that said, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me; and He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And He who gave that answer was even the same who in the days of His flesh "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared;" "for though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."[1] There was a time when He, too, went apart from His disciples a stone's cast, "and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt:"[2] and even "the third time He prayed, saying the same words." And yet the cup did not pass from Him: the Father's will was not so. Nevertheless, "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him."[3]

3. But, besides this, we know certainly that if He refuse us any thing, it is only to give us something better. It may be we asked amiss. We asked for something that would thwart His higher

[1] Heb. v. 7, 8.

[2] St. Matt. xxvi. 39-44.

[3] St. Luke xxii. 43.

purposes of mercy to us. We would have, it may be, the fair things of this life; but He has in store for us better things in His kingdom. You desire to be as others, to have what they have, enjoy what they enjoy: but He has chosen you, perhaps, to be nearer to Himself; to sit at His feet and listen, while others go abroad into the mid-stream of life. For a time it may seem to be sadness and a cross; and you are not able to read its meaning, till some better thing begins to shadow itself out before your inward sight; and you see that what you would have chosen for yourselves would have been a less blessing, instead of a greater; a transitory, instead of an abiding consolation. Sometimes He upbraids our narrowness of heart by His refusals. It may be that we have not asked enough; that we have asked scantily when He was ready to give largely. When Solomon asked for wisdom, the Lord gave him also "riches, and wealth, and honours."[1] If we ask the great things of His kingdom, He will add unto us the less. If we ask of Him life eternal, He will provide for the life that now is. "Take no thought for to-morrow." "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Ask not for the right hand or the left hand in

[1] 2 Chron. i. 12.

His kingdom, but for a place, though it be the lowest place, beneath the feet of His elect. Ask of Him a clean heart, that you may see God, that you may trace His hand in all the ways of life; and He will give you not only things of this life, but also your throne and crown in the manifestation of the sons of God.

4. For, lastly, though He should seem to refuse all we ask, He will not refuse to give unto us Himself. The more you converse with God, the more He will manifest Himself to you. The very act of prayer will make you familiar with His presence. Though He be pleased to take from you, one by one, as from His servant Job, all things you cleave to; yet as all other things are withdrawn, He will compass you about with a more sensible presence of His love. Even as at the last, when there was nothing more to be taken away from the man of many sufferings, the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind; so from the darkness and perplexity of His providence, there come forth, to those whom God chastens, such tokens of His presence, that they are constrained to say, "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear;" such was all my past knowledge, hearsay and a dream; "but now mine eye seeth Thee."[1] Now all is clear; all stands out before

[1] Job xlii. 5.

me in full outline and completeness. So shall it be with those that pray without fainting. By habitual converse with God, they are drawn within the veil through which His providence controls our mortal life. They rise above it; and their "life is hid with Christ in God."[1] Their "conversation is in heaven."[2] They begin to see into the hidden meaning of His government over the Church, and of His dealing with themselves; into the secret of the secret, whereby "to principalities and powers in heavenly places is known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."[3] Whatsoever befalls them, they know to be better than they could choose; the best that can be chosen. "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."[4] To those who are His, all things are not only easy to be borne, but even to be gladly chosen. All events and changes are the will of God in Christ Jesus. They are also the will of those who have fellowship with Christ, and through Him with God the Father. Their will is united to that

[1] Col. iii. 3.
[2] Phil. iii. 20.
[3] Ephes. iii. 10.
[4] Phil. iv. 11-13.

will which moves heaven and earth, which gives laws to angels, and rules the courses of the world. It is a wonderful gift of God to man, of which we that know so little must needs speak little. To be at the centre of that motion, where is everlasting rest; to be sheltered in the peace of God; even now to dwell in heaven, where all hearts are stayed, and all hopes fulfilled. "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."[1]

[1] Isaiah xxvi. 3.

SERMON XIV.

THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST THE STRENGTH OF OUR PRAYERS.

HEBREWS vii. 24, 25.

"This Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

THE Church on earth, in its mysterious probation, is waiting without the veil, until the day of Christ's coming, while He, in the presence of God, is carrying on the work He began on earth. He is gone up on high to accomplish His mediatorial office in our behalf. When He ascended into heaven, He began His intercession with the Father. "This Man," says St. Paul, that is, the Man Jesus Christ, who in our very manhood ascended up above all thrones, dominions, and powers; above cherubim and seraphim; above the nine orders of angels; above all created spirits, to the throne of the Eter-

nal, and to the right hand of God;—"this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood."

He is the one true Priest, of whom all priests that came before Him were but shadows, faint and fleeting, dying and succeeding the son to the father from generation to generation: but He being eternal, hath a true and eternal priesthood. He is not Priest only but Sacrifice, the one true oblation offered by Himself unto the Father,—a sacrifice, like Himself, almighty and eternal.

The fulfilment of His office as High Priest required that He should appear for us in the presence of God. In the Law this was foreshadowed by typical acts once every year. On the great day of atonement, the High Priest took the blood of the sacrifice, and entered in, alone, within the veil to sprinkle it before the mercy-seat, and to intercede for the sins of the people. Our Lord, by His death and ascension, fulfilled these types; for after He had shed His own blood for us, He went within the veil, that is, into heaven itself. He is gone up to stand before the true mercy-seat, in the true temple of God. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."[1]

[1] Heb. ix. 24.

And as He passed through the veil of the heavens into the holy place, so He has opened for us a way; "a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh."[1] By which St. Paul means, that His incarnation is an avenue or path for us to God; that through His flesh we have a way and a plea by which to draw nigh to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God. There is in the Divine presence a Man to whom we are united, through whom we may approach the throne of God. This is what our Lord meant when He said, "I am the Way;" that is, by His incarnation, by our union with Him, and by the gift of His merits to us.

The types of the law further shew us that He is gone into heaven to intercede in our behalf, that is, to stand between God and man as an Advocate and a Mediator. His office of Intercessor is so full of divine mysteries of grace, that to understand it as we ought, we must, under the guidance of His truth and Spirit, dwell for a while upon the depth of its meaning.

He intercedes for us chiefly in two ways.

1. First, by the exhibition of Himself, in His Divine manhood, pierced for us, raised, and glorified. His five blessed and holy wounds are each

[1] Heb. x. 20.

one a mighty intercession in our behalf. The glorious tokens of His Cross and Passion, exhibited before the throne of God, plead for us perpetually. The one great atonement, the one great sacrifice, offered with shedding of blood once upon the Cross, and now offered perpetually, is a continuing sacrifice. His very presence in heaven is in itself an intercession for us. His sacrifice on the Cross, though perfected by suffering of death only once in time, is in its power eternal. Therefore it stands a divine fact, ever present and prevailing, the foundation and life of the redeemed world—before the throne of God.

2. But further, we are told in holy Scripture that He intercedes, that is, that He prays for us. This is a vast mystery, of inscrutable depth. As God, He hears our prayers; as our Intercessor, He prays in our behalf.

How are these things to be reconciled? And how are we to understand that He who is God Himself can pray? Is not prayer a mark of inferiority, and a sign of humiliation? How can He who is co-equal with the Father and with the Holy Ghost be any way inferior? or how can He bear any mark of humiliation in His glory? To pray, is the token of need and of infirmity; at least, of a desire which the intercessor cannot grant himself.

How, then, can He who expressly promised, "If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it," intercede by way of prayer? Is it not altogether beneath the glory of the Word made flesh? Is it not the office of a merely human, and not a divine advocate?

But these difficulties have no reality. They arise from not clearly remembering what and who is our High Priest. He is both God and man: as God, always in glory, the object of worship, the giver of all good: as man, once humbled in the flesh, now glorified. As God, He could never intercede by way of prayer. When it is said that the Holy Ghost "maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered," it is not spoken of His Divine Person and office, but of His inspirations in us: "The Spirit helpeth *our* infirmities; for *we* know not what we should pray for as we ought."[1] As God, then, the Son does not intercede by prayer. Neither as Man does He pray by any reason of need or humiliation. While He was on earth, He prayed as having infirmity: He prayed not only for us, but even for Himself. "In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death;" and this is doubtless spoken of His prayer in

[1] Rom. viii. 26.

the agony at Gethsemane; and though the cup did not pass from Him, "was heard, in that He feared."[1]

While He humbled Himself, "in the days of His flesh,"[2] He prayed as a part of the work He had to do: it was for the accomplishing of the redemption of the world; for the blotting out of the sin of mankind. This prayer of humiliation passed away with the sharpness of the Cross, to which it was related, of which it was the shadow. The prayers which He offered, being yet on earth, were a part of His obedience and suffering, to take away the sin of the world. All this, therefore, is excluded from His intercession now in heaven. When He entered into the holy place, He left all these tokens of infirmity outside the veil.

What, then, remains? There remains yet both His intercession of the High Priest; and as Head of the Church for the body still on earth. And in this there is nothing of humiliation, but all is honour and power; it does not cast a shade upon the glory of His Godhead, unless it be humiliation for the Word to be incarnate, at the right hand of God. His present intercession is a part of His exaltation to the throne of His mediatorial kingdom. But in so high a mystery it will be safer

[1] Heb. v. 7. [2] Ibid.

to use the words of another: "God could bestow no greater gift on men than to make His Word, by whom He created all things, to be their Head, and to unite them to Him as His members; so that He might be both Son of God and Son of man: as God, one with the Father; as man, one with man: so that, when we speak with God in prayer, we might not separate the Son from Him; and when the Body of the Son prays, He might not separate His Body from Himself; so that He Himself, the Saviour of His Body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, might be One, who prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us as our High Priest, He prays in us as our Head, He is prayed to by us as our God."[1] He prays, then, for us as our Priest and Sacrifice, in His own Name, and by the power of His own atonement; now no more in humiliation, but in glory. Time was when He prayed that His work might be made perfect in His own person, and in itself;[2] "Father, glorify Thy Son;" now His prayer is, that what He has accomplished may be made perfect in His whole mystical body, and in every member of the same. His intercession is for His whole Church, and for every one of us in

[1] S. Augustin. Tract. ad Psalm. lxxxv. Petav. De Incarn. lib. xii. c. viii. 10.

[2] St. John xvii. 1.

particular, that the work of His Cross and Passion may be applied to the healing of our souls: that what He wrought for us may be wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, His intercession is continuous and unceasing. It ever has been, and ever shall be, until the last of His members upon earth shall be made perfect: then cometh the end. Until that day, it is the source of all grace. From it all sacraments and mysteries derive their power. The whole work of the incarnation is applied to us by His intercession within the veil. The whole fruit gathered by His Church on earth, is the visible accomplishment of His Divine prayer in the world unseen. It is the strength of our prayers, the stay of our hope, our help in temptation, the source of our perseverance. For consider how great are the perfections of His intercession. It is the prayer of His Divine charity; of that love which brought Him from heaven, and nailed Him upon the Cross. It is also the prayer of perfect knowledge. As God, He knows all our necessities: He knows our spiritual condition with a knowledge which only He can possess. None can know us as He who is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of

the heart."[1] He knows us as our Maker, and our God.

But His intercession has also this further perfection. It is the prayer, not only of Divine love and knowledge, but of perfect human sympathy. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."[2] What as God He could never taste, as Man He tried to the uttermost. He knows us as perfect Man. The mysterious knowledge of personal experience, of personal suffering in human flesh, which He gained on earth, He has still in heaven. Even before the eternal throne He has still a perfect sense of our infirmities, of all the mystery of human sorrow which He learned on earth, from the manger to the Cross. And it is specially in this connexion that St. Paul goes on to encourage us to pray: "Let us, therefore, come boldly," he says, "unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[3] Out of this perfect love, knowledge, and sympathy, He perpetually intercedes for each one of us according to our trial and our day. There can come upon us nothing which has not its counterpart and response in His perfect compassion. While He prays for us, He feels with

[1] Heb. iv. 12. [2] Ib. iv. 15. [3] Ib. iv. 16.

us. To Him we may go as to one who is already pleading for us; and through Him we may draw nigh to God in His perfect merits, which He has given us for our own. They are ours, because they are His; because they are His, therefore He hath given them to us. Such is the mystery of our Lord's gracious intercession in our behalf. Let us, therefore, see how it bears upon us in our daily life, as an incitement, solace, and support.

1. First, there is here a great warning for the sinful. What is our great High Priest now praying for? He prays for the perfect overthrow of sin; that all enemies may be put under His feet; that out of God's kingdom may be cast every thing that offendeth. His perpetual prayer is, the purification of His Church. By virtue of it, every sin, and every unclean spirit, shall be cast into outer darkness; and therefore every sinner, if he will not let go his sin, shall be likewise cast out. If, indeed, he will break off from his sin, it shall be cast out, and he shall abide; but if he will embrace it to his soul, he shall be cast out with it. Every sin of the flesh and of the spirit is doomed to the "lake that burneth with fire." Christ's intercession is day and night prevailing against the kingdom of the wicked one. Little by little, one by one, with sure advance though slow, it is thrust-

ing out every thing that defileth from the bounds of the kingdom of God. As the sun rises with resistless light, first a few clear beams, then a broad stream of brightness, till it stands in mid-day splendour; so is the intercession of our Lord. Nothing can withstand it; all the powers of darkness are even now scattering before His face. "He must reign till He hath put all things under His feet,"[1] and the Sun of righteousness be revealed for ever in the kingdom of the Father.

How, let us ask, does this bear on us? And how does His all-prevailing prayer affect our life? If we be earthly, sensual, false-hearted, proud, impure, vain-glorious, all the Divine power of His perpetual intercession is arrayed against us. Awful thought! "Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth."[2] Let us bear this in mind. Let us remember it when we are tempted, and say, "The intercession of Christ will either separate me from this sin, or cast both me and it out of the kingdom of God. This is the choice before me." It is a great law like the course of time; stedfast, silent, ever advancing, resistless,—when past, irrevocable. Throughout the whole Church on earth this work of secret purification is accomplishing. In the Divine foresight it is already perfect. In the Di-

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 25. [2] Isaiah xlv. 9.

vine government it is day and night fulfilling. His "fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."[1]

2. But in this there is also great comfort to all faithful Christians. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." Day and night are held up on high the pierced hands, in which is strength and mastery for the whole Church militant on earth. We may take a sure consolation from this in our manifold trials. As, for instance: how great an encouragement is this to those who are cast down with fear lest they should fall away. Some people are severely afflicted by this foreboding. Perhaps all at some time have known what it is. Who is there that cannot look back on seasons compared with which his present state seems to be a declension? After our first repentance, we may remember how deep and lively were our feelings of shame and sorrow. We recollect, perhaps, when we felt as if the memory of our sins could never fade, or lose even a shadow of their appalling dye. They were, in our eyes, as "scarlet," and "red like crimson."[2] And we felt as if the eyes of the whole unseen world were fixed upon us in sorrow; as if the thoughts of all around us were

[1] St. Matt. iii. 12. [2] Isaiah i. 18.

dwelling on our detected sinfulness. We hoped to go through life repenting; growing more perfect, and more fervent in compunction, to the end. And what are we now? Or take, as another example, our first communion. It may be that after long expectation and many fears, you came for the first time to the altar, with an awed and ardent feeling of devotion. You felt as if you had been lifted into a new world, where all thoughts and images, shadows and lights, were realities of heaven. It seemed impossible that the freshness and awakening nearness of these great mysteries of the spirit should ever wear away. And you thought that every communion would deepen these perceptions, keep you from all relapses, and sustain you "from strength to strength" till you should "see the God of gods in Sion." So we deceive ourselves, till our sloth or our sin falsifies our hopes. In like manner, also, after a first sickness, when you had once looked death near in the face, and gone down ankle-deep into the cold river, you thought that nothing could ever deaden your intense perception of the sinfulness of sin, the vanity of life, the awfulness of dying. How humbled, chastened, trembling, you were in the day when the shadow of death fell upon your heart. You thought, "If I live, this shall be my state for ever. Surely the bitterness of death is past; and I can never go

back to an easy fearless life; never again be taken unawares." How, then, are you now that your heart beats firm, and your strength has returned into its old channels again? Are you not ready to say, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness. As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle."[1] What, then, is the source of all this conflict and alarm, of this conscious declension and of this enduring hope? If our eyes were open, we should see ourselves to be the subjects of a fearful controversy. We should see the power of Satan striving to wrest us from the intercession of Christ. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee."[2] This is both your peril and your safety. What but this are all our trials? When you are watching a dying bed, or bearing secret anxiety, or buffeted with temptations, though you seem all alone, and tost upon the sea, He is in the mountain in prayer, alone, the only and true High Priest interceding for you. You are crying, "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O God;"[3] and He is interceding either that your

[1] Job xxix. 2-4.

[2] St. Luke xxii. 31.

[3] Ps. cxxx. 1.

trial may pass from you, or that you may have strength to endure it unto the end: which we know not; the issue will shew; the day will declare it. Whichever way your sorrow turn, that will be the token what His prayer has been, and what for you is best.

And, once more, His intercession for us is a consolation in a heavier trial even than these: I mean, in the distractions and wanderings which break in upon our prayers, and sometimes make us feel as if we were cast out altogether from His presence. Nothing is so heavy to bear as this sense of banishment and separation. At times we feel as if He had "covered Himself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through."[1] And this He sometimes permits for our chastisement and humiliation; sometimes to try our patience; sometimes to prove our faith. The feeling of cold, dead, sluggish insensibility; the unconsciousness of His presence, or rather, if I may so say, the feeling of His absence; the unreality of our words, specially the most sacred, when we are on our knees before Him; these make us, day by day, turn with thankful trust to His ever-perfect, all-prevailing intercession. I do not mean that we may take this comfort while we indulge or make light of our distractions, but only when they are our sorrow

[1] Lam. iii. 44.

and our affliction. Then we may say, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"[1] and may stay our feeble prayers on His, which cannot fail.

But beyond this, there are seasons of still greater trial, with which He suffers even those He best loves to be overcast. There are times when you are in doubt or misgiving as to His purpose towards you, or of your own path of duty; when you hardly know what you ought to do, or ask, or will. When you strive to pray, your words outrun your meaning, and seem to ask for things you fear and shrink from; such as greater crosses and denials of your will; things which, when you hear them uttered, you are afraid to have spoken in His sight. At last you are even speechless upon your knees; then take comfort in the thought, "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." You may then say, "What I cannot utter, or discern, He is pleading in my behalf, with a more than human sympathy, with a perfect knowledge, and a Divine compassion. No discernment of mine is enough. I know not what is for my good; I am darkness even to myself. Undertake for me." We should, indeed, be in an evil case, if we had no Head sustaining us in heaven; if we had to bear alone the whole weight of our own anxie-

[1] 1 St. John ii. 1.

ties and of our own helpless and erring hearts. There is no time when we more truly feel our own utter weakness than in prayer; for then His presence and our consciousness meet, as it were, with a direct ray; no trust in ourselves, or confidence in others, or dependence upon lights of our own, whether of conscience or of intellect, will endure before Him. We then feel that we are dark, weak, and helpless. All our hope is, to cast ourselves upon Him, and to pray Him to choose, order, overrule, and reveal our way.

From all this let us draw two rules for our practical guidance, and then come to an end.

1. The one is, to make the intercession of our Lord the measure of our prayers. It is expressly said, that "we know not what to pray for as we ought." We ask amiss, for things hurtful, dangerous, unseasonable. We ask blindly, out of the turbulent emotions of our hearts, and not out of the clear judgment of our consciences. There are in us two wills: a superior, which is the gift of God's Spirit, revealing what is right; and an inferior and sensitive, which is made up of our own feelings, desires, and fears. The former is given us to be our light and guide. The latter, through our sin or infirmity, is the chief rule by which we pray. How often have we asked for things which afterwards we see, if they had been given us, would

have been our destruction. They would have defeated blessings, or precipitated upon us, at a burst, a thousand secret temptations. Happy for us there is interposed a wise and loving will between our prayers and their fulfilment. If we could bring about the accomplishment of all we ask, we should need no other scourge.

Blessed thought, that all our prayers are sifted out by His unerring wisdom. Whatsoever is good He gives us; whatsoever is for our hurt He turns aside; and yet He never refuses us any thing, but to give us something better. Whatsoever He refuses, He will always give Himself—His own presence, help, and strength. Let us, then, pray for ourselves, as He prays for us. Let us ask nothing but what He asks. Nothing, so far as we can, that is contrary to His will. Our best rule is this: to ask the great things of His kingdom, the cleansing of His blood, and the gift of His Spirit. All other things we may leave in His hands; and they shall, as He sees good, be added unto us.

But this need not restrain us from pouring out our own hearts before Him, as He did before His Father: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." We may tell and ask all under this condition. God is indulgent, and loves to give the

very thing we ask for. To doubt this would dishonour His fatherly compassion. He is not only merciful and loving, but has a divine indulgence, a refined and perfect tenderness in blessing us. He gives us not only what we need, but much more; not only what is enough, but what may make us glad: even in the manner, and in the measure of bestowing His gifts on us, He reveals the tokens of His fatherly affection.

2. The other rule is, to make His intercession to be the law of our life. We ought to be what He prays we may become. He prays that we may be cleansed and perfected. Strive, then, so to be. Let your life answer to His prayer for you. Bear this in mind all day long, in your daily toils and cares. Let your will be one with His will, and be glad to be disposed of by Him. He will order all things for you. Every thing shall fall into its own place —joys, sorrows, blessings, the rod of chastisement, and the sharpness of the Cross; all shall be but the carrying out of His intercession, and the fulfilment of your own desires. What can cross your will, when it is one with His will, on which all creation hangs, round which all things revolve? "All power in heaven and in earth is given unto"[1] our Head; and in Him all is ours, if our will be His. Keep your hearts clear of evil thoughts; for as

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. 18.

evil choices estrange the will from His will, so evil thoughts cloud the soul, and hide Him from us. Whatever sets us in opposition to Him makes our will an intolerable torment, a foretaste of "the worm that dieth not." So long as we will one thing and He another, we go on piercing ourselves through and through with a perpetual wound; and His will advances moving on in sanctity and majesty, crushing ours into the dust.

If you will keep your life in harmony with His intercession, you will find the tokens of His prevailing prayer. We are wont to be faint believers in the power of prayer, and therefore we fail either to obtain or to recognise His answers of love. We utter our petitions as children let arrows fly, without aim, or care to find them. If we would keep a watchful note, both of our prayers and of our life, we should find them solving each other as a key and cipher. Both in answers and in refusals, or rather in all answers—for refusals are answers more full of love, perhaps, than all—we should see the accomplishment of our own petitions. Whatsoever you specially desire, ask before the altar. What He does in deed and truth on high, the Church does here in representation and memorial. He offers the one great sacrifice, and prays with perpetual intercession: we spread before Him the memorials of

His sacrifice, and pray over them in the virtue of His one great oblation. Bring your deepest desires, the unuttered craving of your soul to Him in that blessed sacrament, and persevere in your petition. Though He be long silent, even though He say, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs;"[1] still wait, and persevere. You shall have the desire of your heart, or something better than you can either ask or think. He is standing with the blood of atonement before the mercy-seat. We are worshipping in the outer courts of the eternal temple, awaiting His return. When He comes forth again, it will be to bless the Israel of God. Until then, the prayers of hearts which no man can number, of saints, penitents, and mourners, in all lands, the perpetual intercession of His whole body, as one great waterflood, lifting up its voice on high, ascends through Him, who for us has "entered into that within the veil." Wherefore let us draw nigh to Him; for He is able "to save to the uttermost" the greatest of sinners from the deepest abyss of sin, with a perfect salvation, even unto the end.

[1] St. Matt. xv. 26.

SERMON XV.

PRAISE.

PSALM cl. 6.

"Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

THESE words end the Book of Psalms—the volume of the Book of God's praise. The Spirit of God, who filled psalmists and seers with these songs of Divine joy, utters here the great law of creation as the last note of this heavenly strain. God made the world for His glory; and the breath of all living is due to Him in praise. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord." We need not straiten these words to the letter. Breath is life; and it is a summons to all living, in heaven and in earth and under the earth, to all spirits of men and angels, to pay their homage of praise to the Lord of all.

It is a remarkable token of the unity of the

mystical body of Christ, both before and since His coming, that the Catholic Church should receive from the Church of Israel its chief songs of praise. Though "they without us" could "not be made perfect," yet we without them should have inherited no Psalter of Divine joy. Without doubt, the Spirit of Christ, who dwells in all fulness with His Church, would have multiplied the sweet singers of His true Israel, so that praise should never have been silent before His altars. But it may be, that He would teach us a lesson of perfect sympathy and of mutual help among the members of His body; and above all, a lesson of humility and fear. He has so ordained His kingdom, that the Psalter should every day admonish us to remember that we bear not the root, but that the root bears us; lest, being high-minded, we, like them, should be cut off.

In the history of Israel there is, perhaps, nothing more striking than the spirit of praise which broke forth at solemn seasons from the whole people of God. They seem to move before us in a procession of joy. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. . . . And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand: and all the women went out after her

with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."[1] Again: "So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings. And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet."[2] "And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of music, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy. . . . And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps."[3] And again: "It is well seen, O God, how Thou goest;

[1] Exod. xv. 1, 20, 21.

[2] 2 Sam. vi. 12-15.

[3] 1 Chron. xv. 16, 27, 28.

how Thou, my God and King, goest in the sanctuary. The singers go before, the minstrels follow after; in the midst are the damsels playing with the timbrels."[1] "Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel."[2]

This sets vividly before us a state of heart, a temper of love and thanksgiving, a filial and almost childlike simplicity of grateful joy; and in this way it brings out, more clearly than any words, what is the full meaning of praise; from what source it springs, and in what ways it is expressed. If we are to define it in words, we may say that praise is thankful, lowly, loving worship of the goodness and majesty of God. And therefore we often find the word 'praise' joined with 'blessing' and 'thanksgiving:' but though all three are akin to each other, they are not all alike. They are steps in a gradual scale—a song of degrees. Thanksgiving runs up into blessing, and blessing ascends into praise: for praise comprehends both, and is the highest and most perfect work of all living spirits.

Let us, then, see in what praise consists, what are its elements, or rather from what source it flows.

[1] Ps. lxviii. 24, 25. [2] Isaiah xxx. 29.

1. First, then, it arises from a consciousness of blessings already received. In one sense we may say that all the promises of God are actual possessions; for in Christ, whom the Father has given us, "all the promises of God are yea, and in Him Amen;"[1] that is, all are sealed and sure. And again, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for."[2] The faithful do really possess even things to come; and they, therefore, praise God for His promises, on which they rest as if they were already fulfilled. But this is not the consciousness we are now speaking of: I mean, the consciousness of particular blessings bestowed upon us, one by one, of which we have personal and present enjoyment. As, for example, the gift of regeneration; the grace of conversion; the spirit of repentance; the spiritual food of the Body and Blood of Christ: or again, the blessings of life, health, peace, happiness, and home; or restoration from sickness, danger, and the gates of the grave; and the numberless, and therefore nameless, blessings and gifts of this world and of the next, both for the body and for the soul, of which our life is full. Now one great difference between Christians is this, that multitudes take all these as things of course, without any conscious recognition of the gift as such, and of the Giver. The rest see in every blessing,

[1] 2 Cor. i. 20. [2] Heb. xi. 1.

a several token of God's loving care, and are conscious that each one comes direct from His hand, and is an expression of His good-will. Those of whom we spoke first, imagine to themselves a general scheme, in which such things are so interwoven, as to make a kind of woof or texture—one undistinguished continuous whole, beginning, indeed, in the will of God afar off, and all along drawn onward by the movement of His providence—this they at once, when reminded of it, will acknowledge; but they have no sustained and separate consciousness of His direct personal care of them in detail. I pass by, of course, all who receive God's blessings in unbelief, or cold unthankfulness. We are now speaking of a better kind of people. And yet this vague general way of taking the gifts of God, produces great evils in the heart. It forms a habit of insensibility, and therefore of undesigned ingratitude. We well know what we think of a friend who takes all kindnesses as matters of course, and makes no remarks; who enjoys all, and gives no tokens of acknowledgment. So some men deal with God: and the evil does not stop here; for unthankfulness, though it sounds only like a negation—that is, giving no thanks—is really a positive sin; for such people are repining, impatient, and gloomy, if blessings are withheld. What they give no thanks for, they use

as if it were their own; and when it is kept back awhile, or taken away, they feel as if they were defrauded: forgetting that they have been all the while robbing God, not God them. Now as lights are best seen against a darkened sky, so we shall best see what is the spirit of conscious gratitude, by setting it against such a spirit as this. It consists in a watchful, minute attention to the particulars of our state, and to the multitude of God's gifts, taken one by one. It fills us with a consciousness that God loves and cares for us, even to the least event and smallest need of life; and that we actually have received, and do now possess as our own, gifts which come direct from God. It is a blessed thought, that from our childhood God has been laying His fatherly hands upon us, and always in benediction; that even the strokes of His hands are blessings, and among the chiefest we have ever received. When this feeling is awakened, the heart beats with a pulse of thankfulness. Every gift has its return of praise. It awakens an unceasing daily converse with our Father: He speaking to us by the descent of blessings, we to Him by the ascent of thanksgiving. And all our whole life is thereby drawn under the light of His countenance; and is filled with a gladness, serenity, and peace, which only thankful hearts can know.

2. Another source of praise is a sense of our own unworthiness. To receive blessings as if they were no more than we may expect, betrays a strange unconsciousness of what we are, and of what they imply. Even though we were as pure as Adam when he was created, we should have no claims on God. He cannot be our debtor. The very gift of life is free, and makes us debtors to Him in all we are. Our whole being is His by creation: He might sustain or forsake us at His sovereign will. How much more after we became sinners, fallen and dead. Every blessing, therefore, is to us as the ring and the best robe which were given to the prodigal, a token of forgiveness, and gift of fatherly compassion. Of what peace and solace do people rob themselves! They abound in blessings which to their palate have each its own natural sweetness, but they perceive in them no further or higher tokens of especial grace. They do not, perhaps, challenge God's gifts upon their own deservings, but they do not see in them God's love to sinners. A sense of their own unworthiness would change all into a revelation of compassion. Every blessing would then be a pledge of eternal love, which even in our sins still holds us fast. Our daily bread would be a sign of pardon, and, if I may so speak, a sacrament of perpetual grace. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from

above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."[1] His love is changeless; and His mercies, as the light and life-giving influence of heaven, flow down in an everlasting flood, pouring forth in boundless streams upon all "things that have breath." "He maketh His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and on the unjust." In His sight there is none good, none clean: "Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight."[2] "His angels He chargeth with folly;"[3] and "putteth no trust in His saints:"[4] and yet upon us descends, without measure or stay, the fulness of goodness and of grace. Unworthy of the least, we have the greatest gifts: life and being, and all sustenance of life; the Blood of His Son, the Spirit of holiness, the earnest of "the inheritance of the saints in light." The more conscious we are of our unworthiness, the larger will His gifts appear, the more full of all kind of sweetness. It is this that fills the humble with such especial joy. Therefore St. Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace;"[5] and again, "We joy in God."[6] There is no surer sign of a heart which knows the love of God and its own sinfulness than a

[1] St. James i. 17. [2] Job xxv. 5. [3] Ib. iv. 18.
[4] Ib. xv. 15. [5] Gal. v. 22. [6] Rom. v. 11.

spirit of joy. It is a great mistake to think that clouded and heavy looks, mournful tones, and great words of humiliation, are signs of pure repentance. Even in its lowest depths the spirit of penitence is a spirit of praise. "Great is Thy mercy toward me, and Thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell."[1]

3. And once more: this sense of unworthiness opens another, and that the highest source of praise—the pure love of God. It is in every way both right and lawful that we should love God from a sense of His goodness to us; from a grateful acknowledgment of His manifold gifts; which sustain the life both of our body and soul. He is the Giver of all that gladdens and cheers our hearts; the fountain of all peace and solace. He is our shelter, home, rest, and everlasting bliss; and as such we must love Him who is the true end for which we were created. But this love is not pure. It may not, indeed, be mercenary, or for our own sake; though some desire to love God only because it is the way to be happy in themselves. The pure love of God is to love Him as He loves us; freely, because He is love. He loves us, all sinful as we are; but He is mercy, love, goodness, and beauty. Pure love loves Him not for the sake of obtaining the inheritance of life, nor of

[1] Ps. lxxxvi. 13.

being saved from death; but because the Father loves us, and gave His Son for us; because the Son loves us, and gave Himself to die in our stead; because the Holy Ghost loves us, and with miraculous long-suffering still dwells in us. We love Him because He is love, and because He first loved us; because He is our King and our God; because "great is His goodness," and "great is His beauty." To this perfect state pure love aspires, as the flame points to heaven. God is the desired end of love, as the running brook is of thirst. Here is the true fountain of praise and worship—love ascending out of self to rejoice in God. This is the meaning of the Psalmist. Let all created life bow itself before the majesty of God; before the beauty of holiness, the glory of uncreated love. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord."

Such, then, is praise; a high gift of God's Spirit in us, a sure token of His presence in the soul of man.

1. It is, therefore, a sacrifice most acceptable in His sight. There is in praise this special grace, that it looks for no answer, no wages, no reward. It is the free loving joy of a heart grateful for the past, and for blessings now in our hands. And this shews us why it is so much harder to praise than to pray. Our necessities bring us to our knees: our sins, fears, sorrows, the thought of

death, the vision of the Face before which heaven and earth flee away; these bring us down upon the earth. Prayer may be, and often is, no more than the cry of self in pain or terror. Even in sincere and religious minds prayer is the ready utterance of a burdened and troubled heart. The memory of disobedience, a sense of personal sinfulness, a desire of forgiveness, repentance, and the love of God, drive us day by day to Him. The more we know our own needs, emptiness, weakness, and estrangement from God, the more we are excited to pray. And many live in the practice of habitual and persevering prayer, to whom praise is still a difficult task, a conscious effort, in which the heart lags behind the lips. We may all know this from the fact, that we find it easier to realise the thoughts and the spirit of Lent than of Easter; so that there is a strange sense of regret and fear when the forty days are at an end, and Easter-eve comes in. We feel as if we were parting from the presence of a true though mournful friend, a sad but a safe instructor; as if the freeness and brightness of Easter-day were come too soon, and were all too high for us. And so in truth it is; for festivals are foretastes of heaven—the praise of eternity begun. They raise us up from earth towards God, and demand uplifted hearts. The tones of spiritual joy are loftier than the notes of litanies and peni-

tential psalms. To feast with God needs more trust, more hope, more thankful joy, more kindling love. And therefore it is more acceptable before Him, who so desires our bliss, and loves our love, that He has made it the first law of His kingdom, that we should love Him with all our strength. He not only suffers us to love Him; He commands it. And praise is the voice of love lifted up in thanks, blessing, and worship. Sorrow, tears, sighing, humiliation, penance, confession, self-affliction, these things are not the genial tokens of God's kingdom. They came with sin, and with sin they will pass away. To Him they are acceptable only as the just abasement of sinners: He accepts them in us for His Son's sake, as signs of our submission to the sentence of death recorded upon the Cross: He accepts them, because He accepts us in the Beloved. In themselves they have no favour before the eyes of love. They are shadows which follow sin, and with sin they shall be cast out, when "God shall wipe away all tears" from the eyes of His children; "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."[1] Blessing, gladness, and praise, festivals of spiritual joy, and the great sacrifice of thanksgiving, the perfect Eucharist of the whole mystical body with its glorious Head—

[1] Rev. xxi. 4.

this is the homage in which God delights, the true worship of His kingdom.

2. And this shews us further, that as praise is most acceptable to God, so it is most blessed for us. To live in a spirit of praise, is to live a life as near to heaven as earth can be. What can be more blissful than the state of the Psalmist: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy Name:"[1] that is, my whole living spirit: my heart, with all its trust and all its love, all its gratitude and all its joy; my conscience, with all its witness of righteousness and equity; my will, with all its obedience and all its patience; my understanding, with all its reason and all its light; my whole being, with a full assent and fast adherence to God, my "exceeding great reward."[2] Can the spirit of a man reach nearer to the blessedness of angels; of those pure spirits who dwell in God, and live in Him by knowledge, love, and service? "I will praise Thee with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee." "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him." "I will also praise Thee with the psaltery, even Thy truth, O my God: unto Thee will I sing with

[1] Ps. ciii. 1. [2] Gen. xv. 1.

the harp, O Thou Holy One of Israel."[1] And that, too, even in darkness and affliction.

This is a sure test of the purity of our love. We are ready to praise when all shines fair: but when life is overcast; when all things seem to be against us; when we are in fear for some cherished happiness; or in the depths of sorrow; or in the solitude of a life which has no visible support; or in a season of sickness, and with the shadow of death approaching,—then to praise God; then to say, This fear, loneliness, affliction, pain, and trembling awe, are as sure tokens of love, as life, health, joy, and the gifts of home: "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away:" on either side it is He, and all is love alike; "blessed be the Name of the Lord:" this is the true sacrifice of praise. What can come amiss to a soul which is so in accord with God? What can make so much as one jarring tone in all its harmony? In all the changes of this fitful life, it ever dwells in praise. "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime"—in all the full activity and bright lights of life,—"and in the night"—in sorrow, sadness, and chastisement—"His song shall be with me."[2] "O send out Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead me: let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacle. Then will I go unto

[1] Ps. ix. 1, 2; xxviii. 7; lxxi. 22. [2] Ps. xlii. 8.

the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God."[1] What is this but the spirit of heavenly bliss? What is this light but the uncreated Brightness; this truth, but the eternal Wisdom? What is this holy hill, this sanctuary, and this altar, but the presence of God, already seen by faith—the object of all praise, the fountain of all joy? This is heaven itself in the soul of God's servants, who shall one day reign among His saints. Here in this life for awhile prayer is our chief work: yet praise is mingled with it, as a promise and an earnest of blessedness to come. Our worship, like ourselves, is encompassed with infirmity. And our necessities draw us about Him, as the lame, blind, dumb, and maimed, who came that they might be healed. Blessed are they who rise from the life of prayer into the spirit of praise, and learn that prayer is but the earthliest form of worship. They are passing on into that state where praise begins to fill all spirits with the fruition of endless joy. They who are waiting in the outer courts of the Eternal Presence, while our great High Priest is within the veil, cease not to pray; but their chiefest homage is the sacrifice of praise.

In the perfect bliss of Heaven prayer shall

[1] Ps. xliii. 3, 4.

rest for ever. What room shall there be for prayer, when there is no more sin? And what rest from praise, when all eyes shall see "the King in His beauty?" In that Home of Saints, "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. . . . And fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before Him, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."[1]

[1] Rev. iv. 8, 10, 11.

SERMON XVI.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY.

Job x. 2.

"Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me."

God has declared so plainly, that He rebukes and chastens all whom He loves, that we can hardly dare desire to be free from chastisement. Much as we shrink from the thought of God's heavy hand coming down upon our weakness, of the sharpness of bodily pain, and of the anguish of affliction, yet we must still more shrink from such words as, "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Better any thing than this. God is so divinely gentle in His visitations, that if a light stroke, even the shadow of His hand, will suffice for our sanctification, He will send no more. Happy and blessed are they whose conscience is so sensitive and tender, that a slight sorrow, or a soft smiting of His

rod, is enough to waken them into an eager and fervent desire of perfecting their conversion. To be easily awakened, and to open all the ear of the soul upon a fainter call of His voice, is a great sign of a state of grace. It is not, however, enough that it be a prompt, unless it be persevering attention. "When He slew them, they sought Him, and turned them early and inquired after God."[1] "But within a while they forgot His works, and would not abide His counsel."[2]

When, therefore, we are in any way smitten of God, the first thing we ought to ask is, "Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me." Some reason there certainly is: some special, and, by His light, some discoverable cause.

Let us take one or two of the commonest causes of God's chastisement.

1. The first is clearly an unconverted life. By unconverted, I do not mean the life of those, if such there be, who have never received the grace of God; for in them it would be no special and personal sin, as it is in us, not to turn to God, because, without His grace, it would be for them impossible. But who are they among baptized Christians? I speak, therefore, of those to whom an unconverted life is a special state of sin, because they have received God's grace, because

[1] Ps. lxxviii. 34. [2] Ps. cvi. 13.

they are regenerate. This is the condition of great multitudes in the visible Church. They have received that thing "which by nature they could not have." They have in them the gifts and power of a new life, of a life which should be always turning more and more fully and intimately to God, until it be altogether filled with the Divine Presence. But they hold these gifts in unrighteousness, and bring this spiritual power into the bondage of an evil or worldly will. Even in childhood, the seven deadly sins often begin to wax strong, and to grieve the Spirit of our new birth. Then we proceed to positive breaches of God's law and of our three baptismal vows; the mind of the flesh outgrows the spirit, and gains an habitual mastery in the soul. In this way a deceitful childhood grows up into a rebellious boyhood, and a stained and wilful youth, until the force of reason, and a few remaining fears, make a sinner in his manhood to put on a seemly disguise over an uncleansed heart. And many there are who thus become in fact, though not by intention, hypocrites. Or to take a fairer case. It often happens that men grow up without great and actual falls, and yet without any real knowledge of God or of themselves. The unseen world for them does not exist. All qualities purely spiritual, and all realities of a holy life, are to them imperceptible. They have no sense for

them; no eye, no ear, no spiritual capacity, by way of imagination or of sympathy. Such people are often among the most blameless of ordinary Christians. They are upright, amiable, tender-hearted, full of fond affections; within the instincts of nature and of home, loving and beloved: but towards God they have little sorrow, little zeal, little love—no fire of devout worship. Such people are really unconverted. They are not yet turned to God. The world hangs between them and the True Light, and they are dark in the whole disk of their spiritual being. We might take many more cases; but as they would be, for the most part, shades of these two kinds, what has been said will suffice. Now all of these have one thing in common. They are not conscious that God has a special quarrel against them. It is a part of an unconverted state to mask itself. It draws an insensibility over the conscience and the heart. "Ephraim hath grey hairs, and he knoweth it not." This, then, is one question to be asked when God afflicts us: "'Shew me wherefore.' Is it that I am walking after the flesh, or after the world? Is the grace of my regeneration supreme in my soul? or have I served myself, and crossed the Divine intention of my baptism? What was my childhood, boyhood, youth? What am I now? What is my chief end in life, the current of

my desires, the habitual inclination of my will? What is the world unseen to me? what is my heart before God, and what is God to my soul? Am I living for Him, moving towards Him, passing out of myself into Him?" If not, this is the quarrel God has against you; and He will not leave off to smite until either you come to yourself, and confess the stroke to be just and merciful, or He be weary, and give over to chastise: which God forbid.

2. Again, another cause is some sin visible to Him in those who are converted. It may be some one of our original stock of sins not yet mortified; or some new sin into which we have recently fallen; or some relaxation of our spiritual life, out of which has arisen, perhaps, one dangerous temptation, such as lukewarmness, selfishness, or vainglory. There is hardly any thing more alarming than the thought that Satan appears to withhold his other temptations from those who are surely entangled in any one sin. He will let them go on and even prosper in all the circle of their religious life, so long as he can keep his hold by one such sin as pride, envy, or sloth. To be sheltered from temptation by the shadow and shield of God's keeping, is, of course, an unspeakable mercy; but freedom from trials is so often a source of spiritual relaxation, and therefore of spiritual dan-

ger, that they who suffer from them are specially called blessed. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

Now it is certain that in the course of a religious life sins gain an entrance with inconceivable subtilty. Just as we contract slight peculiarities of manner, tone, or gait, without knowing it, either in the course of acquisition or after it is acquired, so it often happens in a life of religion. A person who before his repentance was proud, will, after he has become religious, often insensibly grow to be self-confiding, or self-complacent; soft people become vain or unreal; selfish people become isolated and unsympathising. The sap of the old stock rises into the graft, and lowers the quality of the fruit. Most of our religious difficulties are old faults with new faces, working now upon the desires, relations, and objects of faith, as before upon those of the world.

Or again: through infirmity we may fall into faults entirely new, from which, in times of less religion, we were wholly free. For instance: sometimes those who before they were awakened to a sense of their personal danger were easy and indiscriminate, become almost schismatical in their abandonment of old and even religious friends: others who were formerly humble become opinionated and contentious, thinking it a duty to testify,

as they say; that is, to thrust their own change upon the consciousness and senses of all about them. It is easy to see how soon pride and anger may spring up in such cases.

But a greater danger than these to every one who is turned to a life of religion, is the disposition to relax, which may steal unawares upon the most watchful. The lightest rules, if they be perpetual, become severe; and in that measure our indulgent natures shrink from them; much more from the practice of repentance and the habits of devotion, until they have become the food and delight of the soul. Very few go through a life of penitence and of devotion without many ebbs and floods, many rises and falls of zeal and sorrow. To persevere without drawing back, to go from strength to strength, without intervals of darkness and coldness, is a rare grace, and rarely seen. Let any one look back over his past life, and measure if it be only the quantity of time spent, morning and night, in prayer during seasons of anxiety and fear; or during the first days of repentance, sorrow, or sickness—I say the *quantity* of time; for the *quality* and intensity of desire and contrition are not easily measured—and he will feel how often and how great has been his need of God's merciful visitations to contend with him for the upholding and saving of his soul.

This, then, is another question to urge home upon ourselves. What does God see in me not yet rooted out? what new dangers have I added to my original stock of evil? into what have I fallen unawares? Surely He sees something in me that I see not; something that hinders my repentance, prayers, and love. Is it in the heart, or the imagination, or the will? is it in the tongue, or in the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life?" Is it towards Him, or towards others, or towards myself? My own discernment is not enough, I cannot discover it. Nothing but a light from Thee will reveal it. "Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me."

3. And still further: even on those who are truly turned to His service, and in whom, it may be, there are no special sins, such as I last spoke of, beyond the measure of our fallen state, His rod at times comes down: and for great purposes of love. There is one sure and sufficient cause inviting the chastisements of mercy; I mean, the dull sense we, most of us, have of our original and actual sinfulness. Perhaps there is nothing more awful and wonderful to those who truly repent, and are drawing closer and closer into the folds of God's presence, than the changes which pass over the aspect of their life and state. Ever since they were awakened, sinners they have known themselves to

be. But how great they have never known. They go on, like the prophet in the secret places of Jerusalem, from chamber to chamber, seeing always "greater things than these." Their whole life seems to be a region full of places dark and deep. At first they saw but the horizon and a few gloomy hollows; here and there, a black form and a thick shadow; but, for the most part, all fair and clear. Year by year, new shapes arise, new shadows fall; the lights grow clearer, but make the scene less fair. Holy seasons and holy Sacraments cast upon us a fresh and searching brightness. Our life, seen before the altar, is a new revelation of the past. So, if possible, still more in sorrow and in sickness, when the spiritual sense is quickened to a sensitiveness which the world calls morbid, because it torments it "before the time." At first, we measure our sins by quantity, by number, and by greatness. We have a sort of bead-roll, on which we set down the catalogue of greater acts; of things still visible above the flood of forgetfulness which broods upon the past. The path and series of our life has its marking-points of sin and shame; and we soon learn to look back upon them as through an avenue closing as it recedes, and hiding its farthest objects. This is, perhaps, the first view we have of sin—a view of its quantity, as an object

external to the spiritual conscience, seen rather by the memory than by the soul.

But, all our life long, so far as we are walking in the light of God's presence, and especially in times of chastisement and warning, we are learning to measure our sins by another and a truer rule; I mean, by their quality. What can be more clear than that the greatest breach of God's law may be almost wholly free from malice, and the least sin of the heart contain an inconceivable malignity? The true measure of sin is the intensity of its conscious rebellion against God. And this we learn in proportion as we throw off the deadening power of sin which weighs upon us. It is a change in *us*, which is needed to reveal us to ourselves. What we were and what we are is as objectively real as the firmament of heaven. But the blind cannot behold it, and dim eyes see but little of it. Whenever, then, any trial comes upon us, we may with great safety assure ourselves, that one reason why God is contending with us is, because we do not enough perceive the malignant quality of sin. And in so speaking, I do not mean only of the greater and grosser sins, far from it; but of such sins as are purely spiritual—self-love, self-worship, envy, spiritual sloth, ingratitude, want of love and of joy in God. If we would but slowly say to ourselves, "I was made to love God, and to be happy in Him;"

and then remember not our rebellions, but the great gulf of coldness and distance which stands open between Him and us; we should feel that to love God is itself life everlasting—not to love God is itself eternal death. It may be that there are many more lessons He would have us learn in every visitation; but certainly this is one. So long as we are happy and in health, full of active thoughts, with busy hands, serving and admonishing others, we live abroad, unconscious, and forget ourselves. God loves us too well to let this go on for ever. At any cost, at any pain of heart or flesh, He will contend with us; as much as to say, "Why wilt thou die? What shall it profit thee to gain the whole world for thyself, or even for Me, and to lose thine own soul; after preaching the Gospel to others, thyself to be a castaway?" Every body knows that a busy life in the world, in commerce, or politics, or society, or literature, is very distracting, and calls off our gaze from ourselves. But we do not so often reflect or realise, that a life of punctual religious observance, or of active benevolence, or even a life of pastoral acts, may be eminently beguiling to the spiritual consciousness. It is so nearly united to the interior life of the spirit, and may yet be fulfilled for years with such a perfect want of habitual and conscious intention, that it is most difficult to discern our actual state. For in-

stance, thinking and speaking are acts of our living consciousness so absolutely, that our whole energy and soul is commonly thrown into our words and thoughts: and yet we both speak and think in sleep; nay, we speak without thinking, and we think, even waking, without presence of mind. We may think, and yet be unconscious; or, as we say, with a powerful and true figure, we are *absent*. So it is, as we all know, in religion. Who has not complained of absence of mind in reading holy Scripture, in prayer, in church, and even at the holy Sacrament? Every one has felt this at some time; and what is true, at times, with all, with some grows to be their habitual state. Their eyes rest upon the book, or upon the altar; they kneel for half an hour in their closets; they are busy in almsgiving; devout in the imagination and in the intellect; but they are *absent* in all their spiritual life. This is the secret reason of many falls, declensions, fruitless endeavours, obstinate temptations, and efforts to advance long made in vain.

Who does not, in some measure, know what this means? And how is it possible, that in such a condition we can weigh the quality of our spiritual state? How can we *feel* the malignity of not loving God without love to Him? It is love alone that reveals the sinfulness of not loving. How can we measure our ingratitude, without a spirit of praise?

or our indevotion, without delight in prayer? How can we perceive the darkness of past evils in thought, desire, and will, but by a will and a heart in which the pure light of the Spirit is shed abroad? How can we estimate the exceeding sinfulness of a settled, morose, wilful life of conscious distance from God, without a present perception of the sin of being, even for a moment, estranged from Him, by any consent of our own? Granted that, by God's exceeding mercy and patience, we have in some measure come to feel all this. But at most how little. How much need of the rod to waken us. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken Thou me according to Thy word." What is the intensest perception we have of our sinfulness, even in times of sickness and sorrow, to that which we shall have in the day of judgment, or even upon our deathbed? How great, then, the need of discipline, how blessed the visitation, how loving the Rebuker!

And now, perhaps, it may be asked, "What shall I do when God visits me? How shall I find out what is the cause wherefore He is contending with me?"

To this I can but give two answers, both so plain as hardly to need giving.

1. The first is, Search yourselves and see. And with a view to this, it will be well for us to begin by making, even in writing, in as few words as

possible, or by signs or symbols if we will, a review of our past life; dividing it into its chief seasons, such as childhood, boyhood, youth, and manhood; distinguishing also any periods marked by change of state or calling, which, as they bring new duties, bring also new qualities to our life, and new responsibilities upon our conscience. It will then be well to note under each period all the sins we can remember, especially the first of each kind, fixing, if possible, the beginning, the first opening of each bitter spring; then to trace the widening and increase of each, and their confluence in the broader stream of our after-life; and to see how it all connects itself with our present character and trials. It will be right to remember any persons, in every age, who have been implicated with us, or by us, in our past history. The tale of our life will hardly be more truly written than when our hand is under God's hand. A time of trial, therefore, is specially meet—I may say is sent—for a time of self-judgment. If we throw it away on other things, we shall find that we have lost what nothing, it may be, but another chastisement will restore.

But when we have done this, there still remains the greater scrutiny. Thus far we have only laid up matter for our examination—answers for the questions of God. The next thing is, to

try our life as before the throne of Christ, and with the accuser at our right hand; to fix our eyes, as if we were out of ourselves, upon ourselves—kneeling before the Judge, bound as guilty, with our hands at our back. And the rules by which to try ourselves are four: the seven deadly sins, the commandments of God, the three vows of our baptism, and the two precepts of the Gospel. If we deal truly with ourselves, we shall find that our whole life will put on a new appearance. What we once thought to be a full account, we shall find to be no more than an outline. Every stage of it will be seen to be fuller of transgression than the whole appeared before; every branch of our character to run out into endless fibres of self; what seemed single events, to unite in a chain of habits; even single acts, to contain a world of evil. The enlargement of our sin seems preternatural. It is seen to be manifold, and yet indivisible; untraceably complicated, and yet absolutely one; identified with the very being of our soul, with the very soul of our life. Only, be not afraid when you see these things. See them one day we must: one day, when to see them may be too late, in the light of the Son of man and of His holy angels; when all things now forgotten shall awake, like the piercing consciousness of drowning men; and all our whole life, with every deed,

word, and thought of heart, shall be crowded into one intense and all but infinite consciousness of guilt. O fearful day, even though it were but the twinkling of an eye! How sweet, how soothing, how sadly blessed, is a whole life of penance, rather than one moment of eternal shame! Let us, then, take heart, and search to the very quick; trying ourselves by the letter of God's law; reading it in all its spiritual perfection. And what we learn let us never again forget; let us never again permit the veil to fall between us and the past; nor suffer any the least part of it to withdraw into concealment. Through life let us go on, adding to this awful secret of self-knowledge; reviewing, at fixed times and often, the record of the past, as we saw it in the day of visitation.

2. The other rule is, if possible, plainer than the last. Pray God to shew you your very self. Without the effusion of His light, this is impossible. We are dark to ourselves, and we walk in darkness. Our eyes are outward: what is within is, as it were, behind their gaze. There is, by nature, a spirit of slumber upon the soul, and it cannot wake itself. Like the breath of life, it must come from God into our dust; and such a breath is the free grace of God in our regeneration. There is nothing that more shews the love of God in our election than the gift of His pre-

venting grace. Even after our new birth, we are still, for the most part, in a slumber; especially such as either fall into sin, or live without active habits of devotion. We are as unconscious of the great realities of God's kingdom and our own sinfulness, as if we were asleep; and sleeping men cannot wake themselves. What but God drew us out of this insensibility? What first made our hearts to thrill and tremble, to fear and yearn, to feel about, groping at noon as in darkness? What but the Spirit of God? So it has been to this day. Let us, then, pray Him to shew us to ourselves, especially when He is contending with us in sorrow, sickness, crosses, or disappointments. All these are tokens that He is come to carry on His work of love; that He has not left us, nor given us over: that there is still "hope in the end:" though now it be neither dark nor light, yet "in the evening time it shall be light." Let us, then, pray for the illumination of His Spirit; not fearing to see ourselves as we are, though they who have asked and obtained this prayer have prayed in haste, that they may be hid from themselves again. When we pray for this sight of fear, let us also pray that He will, at the same time, reveal unto us the Lamb of God, lest we be overwhelmed. It is a blessed thought, that if we sincerely desire to know our-

selves, we may leave all to Him. He will reveal it in such measures and ways as for us is best. All our life through, we shall be seeing some reality of our spiritual state more clearly, more broadly, more deeply; and as we see the worst of ourselves, we shall see most of His love. These things go together, and revealing, temper each other to our infirmity; so that all through life, as we draw nearer to Him, we shall more abase ourselves. Ever more and more shall we behold this twofold vision of our shame and of His sanctity, till we shall be without sin before the throne, and in His light see ourselves without spot or blemish in the kingdom of God and of the Lamb.

SERMON XVII.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH A STATE OF LIFE.

Isaiah xxxviii. 1.

"Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live."

Perhaps the most awful moment of our lives is when we first feel in danger of death. All our past life then seems to be a cloud of words and shadows; one less real than another, moving and floating round about us, altogether external to the realities of the soul. Not only childhood and youth, happiness and sorrow, eager hopes and disturbing fears, but even our communion with God, our faith in things unseen, our self-knowledge, and our repentance, seem alike to be but visions of the memory. All has become stern, hard, and appalling. The thought of passing out of this kindly and familiar state, from loving faces, partial friends, soothing offices of religion, hopeful persuasions of

our own peace at last, to go into the world beyond the grave, among souls departed, and the spirits who stand before the presence of our Judge; all things now wound up, all sins weighed and doomed:—this is full of unutterable fear. Such is the burst of consciousness which breaks upon the soul, when any great event in life says to us, "Set thine house in order." It is as if it were the beginning of a new existence; as if we had passed under a colder sky, and into a world where every object has a sharpness of outline almost too severe for sight to bear. Such was the effect of the prophet's words upon Hezekiah. Even he, a saint of God, was overwhelmed. He "turned his face toward the wall," and "wept sore." He said, "He will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will He break all my bones: from day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. What shall I say? He hath spoken unto me."[1]

If this was the effect upon so great a servant of God, what must be the first breaking and the first realisation of approaching death to us? The first

[1] Isaiah xxxviii. 2, 3, 12-15.

feeling which would overwhelm any of us would be fear: fear, that is, of the sight of God, and of the just judgment upon our sins. It is, indeed, true, that to believe in God's mercy through Christ is a chief act of faith; and that to refuse to trust in Him is a sign either of consent in a temptation to despair, or want of the virtue of faith. It is, moreover, a dishonour to the perfect tenderness of our Lord, not to go to Him with a full trust in His supernatural mercy. All this is most true; and yet they who have realised the thought of death as probable or near, tell us, that with this perfect conviction of faith, there is also a deep emotion of fear, which arises out of a consciousness of what we have been, and what we still are, in the sight of Him whose "eyes are as a flame of fire." And although it is also true, that "perfect love casteth out fear," and that it is the very office of faith to extinguish this feeling of alarm which is akin to mistrust; yet, after all, it is absolutely certain that such a feeling does exist, paradoxically, in the soul even of men of great faith and love. With all their perception of the Divine mercy in Christ, they still feel within, the consciousness of great sins and insufficient repentance. Who can judicially pronounce his own repentance sufficient? and who without a sufficient repentance can be free from fear of dying? We talk very

boldly of death, and of calm hopes, and willingness to depart, and the like; but when the time really comes, we shall find it something different from our sincere but shallow imaginations. Next to sin, death is the most terrible of all realities; the very instincts of nature shudder at it; the soul of all men, except great saints, must shrink from it. And even they, though filled with the love of God, are fullest of the consciousness of our fallen state at that last and fearful hour.

Let us, then, see what we ought to do when God warns us.

I will not say repent; because, alas for us at such a time, if we have not repented long ago. We are now speaking not of sinners, or careless people, but of those who in the main serve God, and have been long before in the path of eternal life. What they have to do is, to try their repentance, to see whether it be real and true. But this is hardly to be done by any direct measurement of the quantity or vividness of our sorrow for sin. We have no gauge or balance for such experiments. We have to judge, not so much of past feelings as of our present condition. The true test of our repentance, and the exposition of its real character, is our moral habit before God at the time when His warning overtakes us. Let us, therefore, see how we may try this state.

1. First, we must ask ourselves this question: Is there any one sin, great or small, of the flesh or of the spirit, which we willingly and knowingly commit? This is, in fact, the crisis of our whole spiritual life. We might say, that all Christians may be simply divided into those who do, and those who do not, with will and knowledge, allow themselves in any, even a single sin. To say that we do not so allow ourselves, does not imply any very high state of spiritual advancement, still less does it imply freedom from the commission of all sin. There are sins of ignorance, weakness, strong temptations, sudden assault, which go to make up a heavy account day by day, even against those who neither knowingly nor willingly consent to them. Therefore the state is neither so high as to discourage us, nor so far advanced as to be any great temptation to self-complacency. It is, indeed, the lowest and first step in a converted life. For what conversion of heart can there be, so long as a man willingly commits sin, knowing it to be sin? He thereby plainly declares that sin, as such, is not hateful to him. By consent in one sin, he is guilty of the whole principle of rebellion, of the whole idea of anarchy in God's kingdom and in his own soul. His will and his heart, with its love and inclination, are still under the power and attraction of evil; and this is virtually equivalent to any form

or measure of disobedience. It is a fealty and service to the kingdom of darkness. In truth, both sin and holiness have a perfect unity in their several principles; and they are mutually irreconcilable and expulsive of each other. A holy man is not a man who never sins, but who never sins willingly. And a sinner is not a man who never does any thing good, but who willingly does what he knows to be evil. The whole difference lies within the sphere and compass of the will. This is the meaning of St. John's words, so often mistaken: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." St. John does not intend us to understand that the regenerate are those only who never sin: for then there would be no regenerate in this world, because "There is no soul that liveth and sinneth not." And who "*cannot* sin," if even St. Paul might be a castaway? St. John's meaning is plainly this, that the will of the regenerate is so bent against sin, that he does not sin by consent, but, if so be, by ignorance, surprise, infirmity; that is, his will is universally holy. And so, on the other hand, St. James, speaking of the unity of sin, says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all;" because consent to any sin, as such, is consent to the

whole principle of sin. In this sense, then, we must question ourselves. Is sin, as such, in its principle hateful to us; and is our will bent universally against it? Is holiness, in its principle, lovely and a delight to us, and does our will, in its intentions and desires, universally embrace it? Are we with our whole soul and strength on God's side in an evil world? There are many ways of putting this to the test. The sins of infirmity which daily beset us, are they grievous, afflicting, and humbling? When we have fallen, as by an impatient word, a peevish tone, a selfish desire, an unguarded eye, or a fearless thought, do we turn and, if we can, make amends to our fellow-sinners, and in all make our instant confession to God? Do we stand in fear in the morning lest we should be overcome? Do we grieve at night if we have been cast down? Do we find our infirmities fewer, or less often committed, or sooner corrected than before?

This is the first scrutiny we must pass upon ourselves; for great and awful is the mystery of the will. Its contents, so to speak, for good or for ill, are infinite. Virtually, it contains our whole state, and is itself our whole character in the sight of God. What a meeting with Him would that be of a heart which still consents to any thing against which the will of God is turned as a flame of fire!

"Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire."[1] What wonder we fear to die, so long as we know that to meet God is to meet an Almighty will which we habitually slight? This, then, is the first point in which to try ourselves; and it naturally leads us on to another.

2. We must next search and see whether there is any thing in which our heart, in its secret affections, is at variance with the mind of God; for if so, then so far our whole being is at variance with His. We have hitherto been speaking of our will as it shews itself in the acts of our life. Now we are considering it as it exists, if I may so speak, passively in the heart. It is very certain that even in those who fear to consent actively in any sin, there may still exist the inclinations of sin, suspended in the will, and held under the restraint of fear rather than of holy affections. Such people often really desire what God forbids, and dislike what God desires. Though their will does not openly cross His will in act and deed, yet it reigns in them, and within its own sphere is in conscious opposition to the Spirit of God. The way in which this shews itself is by the affections of love and hate, hope and fear, joy and sorrow, which are feelings of the mind.

[1] Mal. iii. 2.

Though they be never acted upon, yet they are as real as a thousand acts. We may love what God hates, as the pride of life; or hate what God loves, as crosses and humiliations. So also we may hope for what He wills that we should never enjoy, as earthly happiness or ease in life; and fear what He wills we should endure, as bodily pain, unjust suspicions, and the like. Or we may seek our joys where He would have us bestow no care; and sorrow where He would have us without choice or concern. All this implies ill-regulated affections; and what produces so much consciousness of moral opposition as a contrariety of desire and love? What are the affections He blesses and accepts? Love, holiness, purity, meekness, humility, and self-denial, as they exist in sanctified hearts; a hatred of sin, zealous sorrow, humiliation, self-chastisement, as in penitents. Such Christians are truly united to God in will; so that nothing comes amiss to them, nothing is a contradiction to their will. Even crosses are no crosses to them. Sorrows, sickness, failures, disappointment, the hardest trials of the world, such as its false witness and inexorable enmity,—all these, as they come by God's permissive will, so they are objects of the positive will of His true servants.

But what is the case with most of us? How many are happy and at ease in their possessions,

full of innocent but active thoughts, with plans and aims laid up for many years. They hold fast to friends and home: they delight in the happiness of religion, in its sunny side, in the beauty of worship and the majesty of truth; they love religion, because it is their chief source of joy and comfort: but they have no love for its "clouds and thick darkness," its discipline of the Cross, and the mysteries of sorrow by which God works in us both perseverance and perfection. Though we love one aspect of God's will, we have often but little love for the other. Now here is a moral variance between us and Him; a variance which cannot but make us strange to Him, and give to every thought of passing out of life, and going to a direct intuitive vision of His presence, a peculiar quality of fear. Imagine, if we can, before the great white throne, a soul which shrinks from home truths, painful memories of sin, and a sharp discipline of self. Imagine a gentle, amiable heart, without deep convictions of sin or of the Cross, standing before the Word made flesh.

Who does not fear that, if he now were called to stand before God, he would be as the stubble in the blast of the furnace? Surely we ought to fear so long as we are conscious that our will is surrounded by a circle of desires over which self and the world so cast their shadows, as to darken the

tracings of God's image upon them. Yet such too often is our state. In the main, we know that we are on the right side; but we suffer our hearts to run to waste in unchastened and wandering affections, which wind about the world, and cling to life with a tenacious hold. What fellowship have you even with those whom you once knew in the flesh, now made perfect? Would you not shrink from their gaze, and from the sanctity of their presence? How, then, can we but tremble at the thought of entering the world unseen? The apparition of one angel would overwhelm us. How, then, could we endure to pass into the presence of all angels and all saints gathered in the heavenly court? Nay, further, what communion has our heart with the spirit of the Cross? And if not with the Cross, what sympathy with Him who was crucified? Must there not, then, be between Him and us a certain though secret variance, a contradiction of the heart, making us shrink from the thought of meeting? But thus far we have been speaking only of a negative fitness, of the absence, that is, of moral unfitness, for our departure.

3. A third test by which to try ourselves is, the positive capacity of our spiritual being for the bliss of heaven. When St. Paul bids us to follow after "holiness, without which no man shall

see the Lord,"[1] he surely meant something more than a negative quality. He did not mean, that to be free from the soils of sin, or the opposition of an imperfect will, was a sufficient meetness for the beatific vision. Doubtless he meant by "holiness" to express the active aspirations of a spiritual nature, thirsting for the presence of God, desiring "to depart, and to be with Christ."[2] How unreal and unintelligible are many of the Psalms in our mouths. They were the utterances of holy souls yearning for union with the true centre and life of their spiritual being. "Like as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"[3] "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee: my flesh longeth after Thee in a barren and dry land, where no water is."[4] Even then, when the unseen world was veiled, and the heavenly court was not as yet laid open, they yearned, by a spiritual instinct, for something which the presence of God could alone supply. Much more now that the Word made flesh has sat down in His Father's throne, angels and principalities being made subject unto Him; now that

[1] Heb. xii. 14.
[2] Phil. i. 23.
[3] Ps. xlii. 1, 2.
[4] Ps. lxiii. 1, 2.

patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, are gathered round about Him, and the bliss and glory of His kingdom are revealed. With what ardent desire has the spirit of holiness, in all pure souls, thirsted to "see the King in His beauty." As the souls under the altar cried, "Lord, how long?" much more have His saints on earth cried, "Make no long tarrying;" wo is me that my sojourn is so long drawn out; "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." This is the voice of true sanctity, of those that "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and are joined to God by love, as rays hang from the splendour of the sun. But what do we know of these great things? It confounds and overwhelms us so much as to utter, it bewilders and blinds us even to think upon them. These things are for such as delight in God, live in meditation, seek no solace but in prayer, no joy but in worship; are eager for no food but the living bread which is broken at the altar. For these fervent souls, set on fire of heaven, there is nothing on earth but patience, waiting, and desire. Their true home is in God. Their holiness is a fervent aspiration to be unclothed, and to be clothed upon with incorruptible flesh in the kingdom of the resurrection.

But what must we confess? Is it not true, that for the most part our love of God is rather

a conviction of the reason than an affection of the heart? our communion with Him more an excitement of the emotions than an embrace of the will? our prayers full of conscious effort? our approaches to the altar rather dutiful than fervent? Are we not conscious of more sensible pleasure in reading devout books than in acts of devotion? and still more pleasure in the freer exercise of our thoughts and affections among earthly friends, than in consciousness of the presence of God? Nay, do we not shrink at the thought of beholding the host of angels, and even our own friends now made perfect? And what does this betray, but a great incapacity of the heavenly bliss? How long shall we go on deceiving ourselves? It is not only a life stained with sin and kindled with fires of evil, or a soul drowned in worldly cares and in the depths of sense, or a will braced and strung up to intense worldliness and self-worship, or a mind squandered and lowered by levity and empty trifling; but also a heart which is coldly observant of duty, devout in the conception of the intellect, and fervent in the pictures of the imagination,—this too is a real incapacity for the state of heavenly rest. We must learn to live here on earth by the measures and qualities of heaven, before the altar, kneeling in our closets, in fellowship with saints and angels, and with the

ever-blessed Trinity, before we can think to find our bliss in the kingdom of God. His presence, if I may so speak, is the centre of that orb of light and blessedness in which all who love Him live and worship here on earth. The blessed stand at the fountain of light,—we in the outskirts of its glory. If, then, we had our warning now, "Set your house in order," what should we do? If we were to know that we are going to leave all the easy, hopeful, relaxed devotions of our present life, to stand in the brightness of God's eternal throne, what should we feel? Should we not shrink at the thought of eternal worship, spotless sanctity, the vision of the blessed, and the majesty of God? Are we meet to behold and to mingle in the awful realities of the Divine presence? Does not the remembrance of our last communion, or of this morning's prayers, make us tremble at the sense of our unheavenly state? Even though we be consenting in no sin; even though our will be passively subject to the will of God; still are our active affections and the energies of our spiritual being so put forth, and so centred in loving and adoring God, that to die would be not so much a change as an expansion and perfection of our present state? It is the will of God that the capacities of our regenerate life should be here unfolded, that they may be there

made perfect—should be here matured, that they may be there fulfilled. To be pure from the acts and affections of sin is not holiness. We may be free from sin, and yet may lack all the energies and capacities of heavenly bliss; for what are these but the active perfections of pure and fervent love of God, and of all the new creation in God and for God?

These are some of the questions you must needs both ask and answer when the shadow of death falls upon your dial. Happy and holy are they who can say, "Lord, I am in Thy sight but sin and death. But if, through weakness, I offend, it is a wound which straightway makes my heart to bleed. Thy will is my will; in holy obedience or in holy patience, in life or in death, Thy will be done in me. Thou, in Thy mercy, hast gathered in my heart and my love from this life and from this world, and hast hid them in Thy kingdom. 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth I desire beside Thee.' All the thoughts, desires, affections, powers of my soul are set upon Thee, and upon the bliss and fellowship of Thy saints. This is my pilgrimage; that, through the Blood of Thy Son, shall be my rest for ever."

There are now two short counsels which it may be well to add.

1. The first is, that we strive always so to live, as to be akin to the state of just men made perfect. This is to live in fellowship with God, and in the communion of saints. If we live for, or in, this world, so as to sympathise with it, we cannot be fit to die. A life of sense, or of imagination, or of intellect, withdraws the affections from the sanctity and peace of God. We may live a life of almsdeeds, or in vivid imaginative communion with all the members of Christ's mystical body, or in active intellectual fellowship with all saints from the beginning; and yet have no communion with God. For the seat of this is a holy will; and the bands of it are holy affections of repentance and love, of joy and abasement. The chief end and prayer of our lives ought to be, that we may so pass out of the sphere of sense, imagination, and intellect, into the region of the will, that our whole spiritual being may, as far as sin and dust can, be united to the purities and worship of heaven; that as the children of this world are bound in sympathy to the world, so we may be knit by a mighty and transforming sympathy to the new creation of God. This, if we would die well, must be not the ultimate, but the habitual state of our hearts. Blessed are they who have a fervent will, set on fire of God; to whom this world, and all things in it,

are cheap and pale; and their only ardent desire is for the eternal years. For them all things are more real as life draws on. What is passing away is but shadow and decay: their treasures and joys are yet to come. The things they love most, and live in with greatest delight, are but foretastes and reflections; though most real, still but shadows of good things yet to come. Even the sanctuary and the altar, and the mysteries upon the altar, are but the beginning of joy. God's love, God's will, God's holiness; the glory, the rest, the beauty of His presence; the illumination of the soul, its purity, its peace; what are all these but anticipations of the perfect bliss of heaven? If the beginnings are beatific, what shall the fulness be? if they are blissful in faith, what shall they be in vision? O happy life, in unity and continuity with the perfect joy! O that we may live in it altogether! Let us come down upon the water, for it will bear us up; let us not fear to walk where He walked; above all, when we walk with Him.

Even if the duties and works of life be upon us, let us not be cast down. In the midst of all, we may have our chiefest love in heaven. The busiest may live ready to die. If the substance and heart of our spiritual life be "hid with Christ in God," all duties and works of our lot are but occasions either of obedience or of patience, and therein of

our perfection. Let this, then, be one counsel: to live habitually in that state in which, if we should depart, we should pass from a lower to a higher condition of the same spiritual order; from faith to sight; from the first faint tastes of uncreated peace, to the overflow of the eternal fountain.

2. And the other counsel is, that we often rehearse in life the last preparation we should make in death. We know not whether we shall have time for the last dressing of our soul, when God calls us to His presence. A sudden death may cut us away in an hour; a wandering mind, or the distractions of pain, or the weight and burden of our mere mortality, may take our last hours or days out of our control. It is good, therefore, in times of health to try to realise our last passage; to see ourselves upon our bed of death; and to surround ourselves with all the probable images and sights of our last hour; with the objects and the words, even with the very looks which may be fixed upon us then. Joseph made his sepulchre in his garden, in the midst of his most familiar scenes. And he had his reward; for that tomb became a pledge of his election. It will be good for us to set apart some day, as the day of the departure of a sainted friend, or the day of our own birth by nature or by baptism, and to spend it as if it were our last, praying God to forgive our stains of soul and body, the sins of

all our thoughts and of all our senses. And also to approach the holy Sacrament at some certain season, as if we were receiving it upon our bed of death. This will make death a benign and familiar thought. And it may be that God, in His tender mercy, will accept these our timely preparations as if they were our last; and draw over our whole life the spirit of a holy fear, and of a continual readiness to die. Alas! it is no good sign that Christians should so fear to see His face. If heaven be the presence of our Lord, and if death be the passage to His throne, our fears betray how little we know of heavenly blessedness, and how little capacity we have for the fruition of its peace. Let us, then, try, day by day, so to live, that if we were to die, we should but pass out of the conflict and clouds of this earthly trial, into the fulfilment of our most kindled and ardent longings. And, further, let us each one seek, not by high imaginations or by excited emotions, but by deepening in ourselves, and praying God to increase in us ever more and more, both zeal and sorrow, the grace to live the life and to die the death of a perfect and fervent penitent.

SERMON XVIII.

THE DEATH OF CHRIST OUR ONLY STAY.

St. John xv. 13.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

If the thought of sin, death, and judgment, be so terrible, as in truth they are to every soul of man, on what shall we stay ourselves when our time is at hand? Not upon the smallness nor the fewness of our sins, for our whole life is full of stains; nor upon the multitude or the greatness of our good deeds, God knoweth; for where shall they be found? When we come, as it were, into the range and presence of death, our whole consciousness is penetrated with a sense of sin. We see not only the evil we have done, but the good we have left undone. And the good, if so be, that we have striven to do, we seem to see for the first time revealed by some strange and searching light, in which all looks blemished, marred, and sullied.

The holiest soul will, perhaps, be the most overwhelmed, for a time, by this vision of humiliation; so sure is it, that they who do most works of holiness, trust least in them. They cannot but feel, that there is not an hour nor an act of their life in which, if they have not crossed the end of their creation, they have, at least, fallen short of fulfilling it.

On what, then, shall we stay ourselves in the day when the fear of death falls upon us?

1. First, upon the love of God, in giving His Son to die for us. "God *so* loved the world;"—that is, so almightily, so divinely, with the infinite love of the eternal Godhead;—"that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[1] "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."[2] "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."[3] This is our first foundation, that God loves the world; that He looks upon the works of His hands with an eternal and stedfast love, with a tender, yearning compassion. Whatever be doubtful, this is sure. Light does not pour forth from the sun with a fuller and directer ray, than does perfect and eternal love overflow from

[1] St. John iii. 16. [2] 1 St. John iv. 10. [3] Rom. v. 8.

the bosom of God upon all the works that He has made. The mere fact of creation is a proof of love. "He hateth nothing that He hath made." All being is His work, the subject of His power, the object of His love. The force of this truth is boundless. It is true that God hates sin, and, therefore, whatever in us is sinful; for, so far, we have unmade ourselves; we have undone His work; uncreated, so to speak, His creation; so far, we are not His creatures; so far, we are under the shadow of His wrath. But, as the work of His hands, we are objects of a changeless and eternal love. This is a wonderful mystery; a contradiction to the guilty consciousness of sinners. In them the sinner has absorbed, as it were, the creature of God; and all they feel is fear, and a sense of His just aversion. But the everlasting truth still stands fast, that God loves us. It is specially declared by our Lord, that "God so loved the world," fallen as it is in sin, as to give His Son for it. St. John says, that He loved us, though we loved Him not: St. Paul, that while enemies He loved us. All this shews that the love of God is the sphere in which the world is sustained; and that every living soul is encompassed by that love, as stars by the firmament of heaven.

And from this blessed truth flows all manner of consolation. Not only does God hate sin, but He

hates death; not only does He abhor evil, but the peril and perdition of so much as one living soul, —of one, even the least of all things He has made. The Lord hath sworn by Himself, saying, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth."[1] It is as much, nay, far more, against His loving will that we should perish than against our own. Let us, then, sum up all our fears, terrors, and shrinking, our abhorrence of death, judgment, and eternal sorrow, and then know that, while God hates our sins, He abhors our death and misery far more than we. What words do we further need to assure us that He desires our salvation? What promises do we ask? Why do we so far tempt Him as to exact a promise, or to ask a sign? Does a child bind his father by promises to give him bread, or a mother to foster him in sickness? Do not the instincts of nature suffice, in silence, for this perfect trust? Surely the character of God is enough. "God is love." What more do we ask? What more would we receive? "He cannot deny Himself." And therefore when He was "willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel," He "confirmed it by an oath."[2] And "because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself;" that is, His promise was confirmed

[1] Ezek. xviii. 32. [2] Heb. vi. 17.

by His oath, and His oath by Himself; and both His oath and His promise returned into His own perfection. "Surely blessing I will bless thee."[1]

But for us God has done still more. He has, besides His promise, found a pledge to give us. He has given us "His only begotten Son." Here is the very type of absolute love; higher He could not go: for if God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"[2] Into this mystery of Divine love and sacrifice we cannot penetrate. The love of the Holy Three, the Blessed One, is a depth before which we can only fall upon our face and worship. As if His eternal character were but a small thing for our assurance, God has added this further, that He has given unto us His Son, "the Son of His love." He gave Him up to suffer all humiliation, agony, and death; all that the Divine nature most abhors; and He gave Him to be ours in so full a right, that we might offer Him as our own in sacrifice for our sins. Here, then, is the first foundation, the basis of the spiritual world, in which the new creation of God is laid,—the love of God in the gift of His Son. When we are overtaken by the fear of death, or the consciousness of sins of which we desire to repent, let us first rest ourselves upon the infi-

[1] Heb. vi. 14. [2] Rom. viii. 32.

nite love of our Maker. It must be a strong and strange necessity that can thrust itself between Him and us; and so contradict the will of both as to turn aside His love, and to destroy our soul. "Like as a father pitieth his children, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust."[1] His creative love alone would be enough to still our fears, and to shew us that, if any perish, it is not because He is austere, but because they are evil. The whole will and kingdom of God is love; and to Him, in that kingdom, we may come with boldness of hope and trust. How much more now that He has revealed His love to be two-fold, in creation and in redemption, by first giving us unto Himself, and then by giving unto us His Son; now that He is "in Christ," not waiting our overtures of peace, but "reconciling the world unto Himself."[2] It is He, the Almighty and the offended King, who sends an ambassage of love, lowering Himself to be beforehand in the tokens and effusion of His mercy.

But it is certainly true, that we are not able to stay ourselves on this alone. If we were upright as in the beginning, or perfect in our conversion, we might need no other consolation; but being, as we are, fallen, and soiled, weak, and, at the best, im-

[1] Ps. ciii. 13, 14. [2] 2 Cor. v. 19.

perfect in repentance, we cannot but stretch out our hands for more and more assurances of His tender mercy,—of the mercy we need, not as creatures, but as sinners. That is to say, we are convinced of it as an object of faith, but we are full of misgivings in applying it to our own soul, and to our own hope of life. We want something to assure us with a more intimate personal conviction. And even this He has given us besides.

2. For we have, as a second foundation on which to build our trust, the love of the Son in giving Himself for us. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." When we remember who He is that gave Himself, and for whom, and to die what death, we cannot find capacity of heart to receive it. As an intellectual statement it is easy to enunciate; but as a moral fact in our affections it is hard to realise: so deep is the mystery of love. If He had saved us by a new exertion of His creative will, it would have been a miracle of lovingkindness. If He had spoken once more the first words of power, and created us again in light, it would have been a mystery of sovereign grace. If He had redeemed us by the lowliness of the Incarnation, still revealing Himself in majesty, though as a man, and lightening the earth with His glory, as Saviour, God, and

King, it would have seemed to us a perfect exhibition of the Divine compassion to a sinful world. How much more when He came to suffer shame and sorrow, all that flesh and blood can endure, to sink, as it were, into the lowest depths of creation, that He might uplift it from its farthest fall? There was no creature of God, as a creature, beneath His estate. Nothing but sin itself can sink lower than the Son of God. Of all men, as man, He was the last; "a worm, and no man; a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people."[1] He came to "lay down His life." Even the mystery of the Incarnation, His words of grace, and His works of power, were all too unemphatic, too inarticulate, to express His love. There was needed something deeper and more awful still. "Being in the form of God," He emptied Himself of His glory. His Godhead He could not lay aside for us; but He took to Himself something—the dearest and most precious to the soul of man—He took our nature, and therein a life, the most loved and priceless of all gifts of God. There is nothing to be compared with life. We cherish it as our very self; it is the centre of every care; the end of all our labours. "All that a man hath will he give for his life."[2] Such He took unto Himself; and thereby He possessed Himself of something He might give for us.

[1] Ps. xxii. 6. [2] Job ii. 4.

"Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me; but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."[1] It was a distinct personal act, a deliberate choice, first made in His own will, then followed out in suffering to its fulfilment. He had, by the mystery of the Incarnation, obtained a price of greatest worth, of which He could strip Himself for our sake, ascertaining to us thereby, in some measure, by the scales of a man, the love He bare to us.

If He so loved us as to die for us, what will He not grant or do? If He gave His whole self, will He keep back any partial gift? Will He not save us, who Himself died for us? If He loved us when we loved Him not, will He not love us now that we desire to love Him again? If He gave Himself for us when we were in sin, will He not hear us now that by Him we are regenerate? Notwithstanding all our manifold provocations, yet if He offered Himself for those who were impenitent, He will surely listen to us now that we grieve at the wounds wherewith we have pierced Him; now that we count ourselves among His scourges, mockeries, and thorns. Well might St. Paul call it "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" well might

[1] St. John x. 15, 16.

he pray for the illumination of the Holy Ghost, that we might "comprehend with all saints what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height" of the mystery of the Cross, its eternity, its infinite embrace, its fulness, and its perfection. When sin and conscience overwhelm us, here is our pledge of pardon. No man ever loved us as He. Neither friend nor brother, father nor mother, sister nor child, none ever loved us with such intense, changeless, discerning love. Sinners though we be, we may say, "None ever so loved me—not for what is in me—not for any love of mine—not for any mutual joy—but for my own sake, because I am a living soul, created in His own image, capable of eternal weal or woe. He loves me, not for what I am, but in spite of what I am. He has loved me always, and loves me still; and to that love I go, as to a supernatural mercy, to a miraculous pity, to a divine compassion. He will not cast me out, much less will He cut me off, if at least an almighty justice can save my soul alive."

And this touches upon the quick of our fear. Loving, pitiful, and tender, He is also holy, pure, and just. It may be, you are saying to yourself, "Though He gave even His own life to reveal His love and desire to save us, am I such that He can save while He is also just and pure? My sins have created a necessity that, if He cannot

shew mercy, He must be just. Guilt and soils cannot enter the kingdom of God; and I have both. I do not mistrust His love; for 'greater love hath no man than this;' and He has given me His pledge, even His very life. But I fear the eternal necessities of justice, and the sinfulness which has clung to me since the first awakening of power and will."

3. Now it is specially against this deepest fear of the soul—this only fear, for none can really doubt His perfect love — that He has given us an absolute assurance. He has laid a foundation which cannot be moved—His own death for us upon the Cross. Hitherto we have looked upon it only as a revelation of Divine love to us; now let us look upon it as a Divine atonement for our sin. How it is so, we may not eagerly search to know. That by death He has destroyed "him that had the power of death,"[1] and taken "away the sin of the world," is enough. In that death were united the oblation of a Divine person and the sanctity of a sinless man; the perfection of a holy will and the fulfilment of a spotless life; the willing sacrifice of the sinless for the sinful, of the shepherd for the sheep that was lost, of life for the dead. How this wrought atonement for the sin of the world, we cannot say further than is revealed. God

[1] Heb. ii. 14.

"made Him to be sin for us."[1] "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree." "By His stripes we are healed." How the guiltless could take the place of the guilty; how the penalty due to our sin could be laid on any but ourselves, above all, on One who was sinless; and how such a translation of punishment could also translate us from the throng of the guilty to the company of the guiltless; how the eternal Righteousness has been pleased to unite this atonement to His own changeless severity; how the iron link between sin and death has been broken through, and the power of both abolished,—and all this at once, by the death of a Divine and sinless Person,—must, at least in this our wayfaring on earth, be a mystery unsearchable, and a depth past finding out. We may, perhaps, be admitted within the veil in the heavenly kingdom; we may behold this secret of eternal justice in the vision of peace. But in this life, it is enough for us to know that He hath tasted "death for every man;" that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Deeply convinced as we are of this corner-stone of truth, we are still only able to realise it in part. The consciousness of personal guilt, both original and actual, the sense of indwelling and habitual

[1] 2 Cor. v. 21.

sinfulness, makes us to shrink even in the presence of the Cross; as if by it the sin of all the world were taken away except our own. We are wont to say, "If I had not this consciousness, I would firmly trust that *my* sin is also taken away. But this consciousness cries out, and clamours against my intellectual convictions. My spiritual nature contradicts this flattery, and forbids me to rest upon a truth of the abstract reason."

Now what does this mean? It is, in truth, as much as to say: "I would trust in the death of Christ, if like Him I were without sin." Or, "I would trust, if sin were first so wholly cleansed away from me, that in all my consciousness there remained no memorial of the fall." What is this but a virtual rejection of the atonement, that is, of a sacrifice for *sinners?* What is it but unbelief to say: "I would trust in it, if I had no need of it; but because I am conscious of the need, I dare not, or I will not?" What does this mean but, "If I had no need, I would therefore trust" (having then no need to trust at all); "but because I need, I dare not," that is, "I have no faith?" Surely this is the very crisis between the religion of nature, which teaches no fall and no atonement, and the Gospel of life, of which sin and the sacrifice of Christ are the beginning and the end. Therefore, in one word, the reason why we may,—nay must, cast ourselves upon

the atonement of His death, is this same consciousness of sin, which crushes us to the dust. To whom else shall we go? To what power in heaven or earth, to what purging fires, to what healing streams? "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down into hell, Thou art there also." We cannot fly from Him: we cannot fly from ourselves. The sin that is in us cleaves to our very life. Where we go, it goes; when we lie down, it broods upon us; all day long it wakes with us, all night through it moves with our sleeping thoughts; it follows us as the shadow of our being; and its blackness always lies full length upon our hearts. Such we are, and must be, till He change us; and as such, we must go up to the foot of the Cross, and fall down, and hold fast by His pierced Feet. Just such as we are we must go: though it is all the more fearful as it is the more blessed: the more we need that atonement, the more we must shrink as we draw near to it. But He will suffer us to make no terms, nor compromises; to prescribe no conditions on which we will believe ourselves to be forgiven. He will have faith, undoubting, unreasoning, simple,—childlike, hopeful, loving faith. Do we, then, know so much better than He the necessities of the eternal world, the prerogatives of His own kingdom, the harmony of His attributes, the due measure of

His holiness, the glory of His throne; that we will not accept our pardon on such unequal terms? Do we so far better know than He what is our own state before Him, that we may put His atonement by; as self-trusting patients analyse the skill of their physician? What He would have, is not the sight of our eyes, nor the discernment of our wit, nor the measures of our intellect; but the affiance of our will, and the trust of our hearts. It is the very trial of faith, as much to contradict within its own sphere the doubts of our natural consciousness, as the impressions of our natural sense. If "we walk by faith, not by sight;"[1] much more are we saved by faith, not by the sensations of a fallen nature.

But here an objection may be made,—of great weight, if well founded; and of apparent weight, ill founded as it is,—namely, that consciousness is the reflection of conscience, and that conscience is a guide given us by God. And as we cannot put two divine gifts in contradiction, we therefore cannot put faith against a conscience which convinces us of sin.

Now to this we must answer, strangely to the ears of some, that we must not, and yet that we must so contradict ourselves. And with a few words of explanation we will make an end.

[1] 2 Cor. v. 7.

1. First, then, it is clear, that we must not put faith in contradiction to our consciousness of sin, if by that we mean a sentence of our heart, convicting us of any wilful sin. In this sense, conscience and consciousness are one and the same; conscience implying the judicial sentence of the soul upon itself, and consciousness, the diffused sense of its own condemnation. When we can find in ourselves sins wilfully committed, and not repented of, or sins wilfully repeated after repentance, whether they be grosser and less frequent, or more refined and of habitual commission; or if we know within ourselves, that we are living without any true relation to the presence of God; consenting in the evil and darkness of our hearts; cold and dead in our religious affections; formal and lifeless in prayer; without humiliation, self-discipline, self-knowledge; without thought of death and of God;—if this or any such state be our settled and habitual condition in His sight, then without doubt, it is mere antinomianism, or presumption, or blindness of heart, to talk of faith in the atonement of Christ. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." When the moral and spiritual nature is so estranged from God, so severed and deadened,—I may say, so opposed and hostile to the Divine holiness, love, and will,—it is worse than self-deceit to talk of resting upon

the death of Christ. This is most certain, and can never be too often or too strongly repeated. This describes the character of wilful sinners, open or secret, worldly and unconverted souls; pharisees, hypocrites, sluggards, self-deceivers, and the like. But surely it is no discovery to find out that such as these can, in that state, put no trust in the blood of the Cross. When really sifted to the bottom, then, the objection means nothing more than this: "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" "A man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" "What doth it profit, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works; can faith save him?" "Faith, if it have not works, is dead."[1] In this sense, then, let it be said, with all words and tones of warning, that the love of God, and of Christ, and His precious death upon the Cross, are all in vain to the man who is conscious of wilful and unrepented sin.

2. But, lastly, there is a sense most true and most blessed, in which we not only may, but must rest by faith in the death of Christ, in despite of our consciousness of sin; and that is, when that consciousness is a memory of sins, wilful indeed in

[1] St. James ii. 18, 20; 14, 17.

time past, but repented now, or committed through weakness, with instant sorrow, and against our habitual will. For what is this but the state of every true penitent, or of every just man not yet made perfect? If such Christians as these may not trust themselves to the atoning death of Christ, the Cross must stand deserted and fruitless as a dry and barren tree. What are penitents but those in whom memory, imagination, thoughts, tumultuous emotions, vehement drawings of the will, and struggles of the heart against the conscience, cloud and disturb the consciousness of the soul? They are haunted by a sense of the presence of sin, and yet "who shall separate" them "from the love of Christ?" Nay, what is the condition of those who have long been converted to God but one of warfare, of frequent self-accusation, and of trembling self-mistrust? Take the most watchful and stedfast of God's servants, and ask whether his consciousness is so clear and cloudless, that he can therefore, without a fear, apply to himself the sacrifice of the Cross. "To which of the saints wilt thou turn?" Ask of the chosen vessel, the elect apostle. "I know nothing by (that is, of, or against) myself; yet am I not hereby justified. But He that judgeth me is the Lord."[1] Even he must say, "I count not myself to have apprehended;" and "if by any

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 4.

means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."[1] It is, then, most true that no one may deceive himself by trusting in the death of Christ, so long as his conscience condemns him of wilful sin; but it is equally and as absolutely true, that no man can rest his trust in that atonement upon the possession of a sinless consciousness. The grace of faith is a gift specially meted out to the necessity of those who are in neither of these states; but in that middle condition in which a heart, sincerely converted, clings with all its grasp to the atonement of the Cross. This is its only safety against the malignity of the devil, the power of temptation, the infirmity of our manhood, and the flexible treachery of our own will. The full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice of the Cross is the only stay of the soul, from the hour of its sincere conversion to the change which shall make us to be "pure even as He is pure." Let us, therefore, guard with all watchfulness and prayer against every consent of the heart in any thing of evil. Let us withdraw ourselves by the whole power of our will, through the help of the Holy Spirit, from all communion with "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." What then may come upon us is from without. It is not our sin, but our scourge; permitted to try and to humble us.

[1] Phil. iii. 13 and 11.

Even though we fall, as saints have fallen, yet let us not cast away our trust. When trust is gone, hope is dead; and where there is no hope, there can be no repentance: for where there is no love, there can be no contrition; and love cannot survive the death of hope; for the loss of hope is despair, that is, the fear of certain perdition, "the fearful looking for of fiery indignation." Therefore it is that Satan strives above all to destroy in us the power of faith, hope, and love,—the three blessed gifts of grace infused by the Holy Ghost in our regeneration. If these can be destroyed, and their spiritual antagonists implanted and matured in the soul, it matters not what we profess or practise. The revealed object and the productive source of these three virtues of the Spirit is the atonement of the Cross. Let us hold fast by this; and they will be replenished by a perpetual effluence of His Divine love, streaming into our souls, and drawing them back, as by a tide, unto Himself. He has so united us unto Himself, that when He died for all, we died together with Him; and because He liveth, we shall live also. His life and His death are inseparably ours. Death has done its worst against us already upon the Cross. And "our life is hid with Christ in God." Let us, then, strive to say to our own heart, in the words of a saint now in His kingdom: "While

there is life in thee, in this death alone place all thy trust; confide in nothing else besides; to this death commit thyself altogether; with this shelter thy whole self; with this death array thyself from head to foot. And if the Lord thy God will judge thee, say, Lord, between Thy judgment and me I cast the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; no otherwise can I contend with Thee. And if He say to thee, Thou art a sinner; say, Lord, I stretch forth the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my sins and Thee. If He say, Thou art worthy of condemnation; say, Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my evil deserts and Thee, and His merits I offer for those merits which I ought to have, but have not of my own. If He say that He is wroth with thee; say, Lord, I lift up the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between Thy wrath and me."[1] Let this be our confidence. The love of God in Christ; the love of Christ in dying; the death of Christ upon the Cross; lifted up for us; a perpetual sacrifice; one, spotless, all-prevailing; ever fresh, ever full of life; infinite in price, virtue, and power. In life and death, in our last agony, in the day of judgment, be this our only stay, our hope, our all.

[1] S. Anselmi Admonitio morienti, Opp. p. 194.

SERMON XIX.

THE FEARFULNESS OF DEATH.

Psalm lv. 4.

"My heart is sore pained within me, and the terrors of death are fallen upon me."

In the version of the Psalter used in the Prayer-book, this verse stands with a more homely and expressive simplicity, "My heart is disquieted within me, and the fear of death is fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and an horrible dread hath overwhelmed me." The fear of death is upon all flesh. It is no sign of manhood to be without it. To overcome it in the way of duty is courage; to meet death with patience is faith; but not to fear it is either a gift of special grace or a dangerous insensibility. No doubt great saints have been able to say, "I have a desire to depart." And many have rushed to

martyrdom, as to the love and bosom of their Lord: but for the rest, the multitude of His flock, who are neither wilful sinners, nor to be numbered among saints, the thought of death is a thought of fear. We see that, on the first feeling of their having so much as set foot in the path leading to the grave, even good men feel the "terror of death,"—"a horrible dread," which makes every pulse to beat with a hurried and vehement speed. Their whole nature, both in body and in soul, trembles to its very centre; and their heart is "disquieted," "sore pained," within them.

Now why is this? Let us try to analyse the feelings which swell so tumultuously, and to separate them into their distinct elements; that is, let us see what are the causes or reasons of this "fear of death."

1. The first must needs be a consciousness of personal sinfulness. A sense of unfitness to meet God, our unreadiness to die, a multitude of personal faults, evil tempers, thoughts, and inclinations; the recollection of innumerable sins, of great omissions and lukewarmness in all religious duties, the little love or gratitude we have to God, and the great imperfection of our repentance;—all these make us tremble at the thought of going to give up our account. We feel as if it were impossible we could be saved. Shame, fear,

and "a horrible dread" fall upon us. It is no answer to this to say, "We are not saved by our own righteousness, but by the righteousness of Christ. We must look not at ourselves, but at Him." This is as true in the abstract as it may be untrue in the application. We must look to ourselves, when we would know whether we may so forget ourselves; for He Himself has said, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."[1] It is but an empty saying of "Lord, Lord," to talk of faith, and trust, and the like, without a real living belief in Him; and this is to be known and tested by the facts of our life. The only cognisable form of faith is obedience; and alas for us, if we trust to it in any other shape. It is said that Satan, who can transform himself into an angel of light, has before now come to tempt men in many seeming appearances of Christ. But he never has shewn himself as upon the Cross. This one aspect is to him impossible, because it is divine and true. So it is with faith. We may be tempted by a faith of the reason, a faith of the imagination, a faith of pious desires, and a faith of good intentions. And all these may be no more than snares. But a faith

[1] Matt. vii. 21.

embodied in obedience is Divine faith, which Satan cannot feign, and by this none can be deceived.

How few, then, when they are called suddenly to make ready, can say that their faith has been a life of holy obedience. For the most of us, we must confess that our sins are "more in number than the sand of the sea." How, then, can we think of death without fear? whither, and to what doom would it carry us away?

It is very easy to talk theologically (and, therefore, in one sense truly) on the subject of our acceptance through the blood of the Cross; but examine your hearts at the time when you begin to realise the thought of being judged before God (how soon or when, you cannot tell), and say, whether, after all, there is not a feeling of most just and reasonable fear, of which you could not divest your mind, without also putting off a part of your regenerate nature. Let any man say to himself, "I am now going to be judged before God;" and if he knows and believes the meaning of his words, it is impossible he should be without alarm. Let him say, "Now all my whole life must return upon me, as the consciousness of one moment. Childhood, boyhood, youth, manhood, with all their remembered sins, and, still more awful, with all their sins now forgotten." What can be more alarming than the thought that the perpetual waste of memory is

more profuse in nothing than in the remembrance of daily and hourly sins? Who knows what, after his often-repeated confessions, may still be against him? We shall know it all when we shall see God, and in Him see ourselves; but then will be the time not of repentance, but of judgment. How often do we discover some little danger, of which we are afraid, while others discern some much greater peril, of which we are altogether fearless. How often, in a sickness, people alarm themselves with trifling symptoms, or take full and confident hope at trifling amendments, when some vast and prominent danger, unperceived by themselves, stares every body else in the face. So it may be with our souls. We see some of our sins; we take comfort at marks of a better mind; but sins black, countless, and forgotten, are bare to the eyes of God, and of His holy angels. This, then, is one great reason for fear; and this explains the common saying, founded on a various reading of the first verse of the ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes, that "no man knows whether he is worthy of love or hatred;" that is, at most, he knows his own case so little, that after all his hope and trust in God's mercy through Christ, he cannot shake off a fear that he may, in the light of God's presence, see himself to be very different from what he believes now. No one can have used habitual self-exami-

nation, or watched the treacherous uncertainty of his memory, or measured the growth of his convictions of sin, without deeply mistrusting, at every stage, his knowledge of himself; and feeling it very possible that he may see himself before the throne of Christ to be as far different from what he thinks now, as he sees himself now to be from what he once thought before his conversion, or in the beginnings of his religious life.

2. Another reason, closely following upon the last, is the consciousness that death is judgment. At the death of each several being, a particular judgment upon the soul is passed and recorded before God. Wherefore in the thought of death, there is an awful sense that all is over, all is run out, wound up, sealed, stamped, and bound over for eternity: that all the predestination of God towards us is fulfilled; that life is spent, regeneration has been conferred upon us, with all holy inspirations of truth and grace, and all discipline of Providence and probation; that all which was once possible has now become either actual or impossible; that we have had our time and trial; and that, for weal or for woe, our eternal state is fixed for ever. There is something sorrowful and moving in the full end of any thing. It is sad to know for certain that we shall never go to any particular place again; never again see

this or that person, do such or such definite act, or hear a certain strain of music, and the like. Even the end of a hard toil is mixed with sadness. The words "no more," "never again," are severe and melancholy; as they know, above all, who have wept over their dead; though with them, if they be Christ's, such words are false, yet the thought of a full end, as if something were extinct for ever, is very sad. It clashes with the first instinct of our being. How much more when that which is over is the day of grace, the acceptable year of the Lord? No more hopes and restings on a future amendment; no more trust, half-blind, of a more devoted life; no more feasts or fasts; no more sacraments of cleansing; no more worship and adoration; no more secret abasement in the sanctuary; no more sacrifice and communion at the altar; no more words of hope, encouragement, and comfort; no more warnings, discipline, and chastisement; all the whole life of grace, with all the ministries of the Church, and all the loving expostulations of God, have been fully tried, exhausted, and, for us, brought to a full end for ever. Such as we are, such we shall be eternally.

And when this end is come, and the revelation of our doom is as yet uncertain, how can we but say, "Oh, if I had known, even I, at least in this

my day, the things which belong unto my peace; if only a little earlier, what sins should I have avoided; if only I had taken this warning or that counsel; if only I had been more fearful, more fervent, more sincere: but now, such as I am, such I must go, with all these shreds and weeds of misery,—a memory laden with sins, a soul darkened by itself, and a heart beating itself asunder for fear. No time now; I am on my way to God. His bidding has overtaken me in my present disorder, full of active thought of ten thousand cares, under which the consciousness of His presence and will lies buried. I am going to hear that one great revelation which, to me, is heaven or hell." This ought surely to abate the confidence with which people talk of dying; not fearing to die, because not knowing what death is. What is it but the absolute fulfilment either of God's will in our salvation, or of our own will, if sinful, in our perdition? What is it but either the sealing of a saint, or the branding of a reprobate soul?

3. Thus far I have spoken only of the fears which arise from the departure of the soul. There is also in the body a reason for fearing death. The thought of pain and distress is very searching. Bodily pain is hard to bear. It is a fearful mystery. What is it? and whence does it come? God did not make pain. It is no part of the first

creation, neither has it any place in the second. There was no pain in the world which He blessed in the beginning. His works were all good, and good only. But among the hosts of evil, pain is one of the foremost. It is the direct forerunner of death, and the scourge of hell. It so penetrates the whole of our being, that when it enters one part, it is felt throughout the entire reach of our consciousness: whether it be pain of the body or of the soul, it has the intensity of a focus, with an universality which knows no limit but our sensation. Who, then, can but fear the pains of death? Who can but tremble at the thought of an unseen and mysterious power entering, against our will, into the depths of our nature, and wasting the source of life? Pain is, in fact, the presence of death: and the only question is one of measure and time, that is, how soon it shall put forth its whole strength, and appear in its full array. It is a terrible thought to forebode the withering and corrupting of the body. All men must have a last sickness, which, when once begun, either is soon ended, or else keeps on its stubborn and stealthy way, in spite of the skill and science of healing. It is like a smouldering fire, which, when it breaks out, is for a while got under, and yet by suppression is but thrown in, to spread more widely and deeply than before. So death

creeps on, under a fair aspect, till it has gained its entire hold; then it unmasks itself and reigns supreme. We may well shrink from the thought of helpless and motionless distress, palsied limbs, clouded eyes, broken speech, unsteady thoughts, and an impotent will. Such are the tokens of death in its short dominion. Who does not shrink from being that from which he has shrunk upon another's deathbed? It is a bitter humiliation, with a living consciousness, to be changed into corruption; and to lie under the eyes of bystanders as a thing to be talked of and endured.

4. Again, there is another reason which is full of melancholy. Death is the end of a multitude of pure and blessed enjoyments. "A pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."[1] Fallen as this world is, it is very beautiful. The sky and the earth, lights and clouds, colours and brightness, the lofty mountains, the teeming earth, the rank rich valleys, "the streams that run among the hills," evening and morning, the long shadows of the east and west, the song of birds, and the voice of all things living, — these are blessed and soothing; much more the softness, peace, and loveliness which is shed abroad upon the earthly homes of those that fear God; fond affections, close friendships, bonds

[1] Eccles. xi. 7.

of gratitude; the joy of receiving, the blessedness of bestowing alms and kindness: but above all these, the bonds and order of mystical charity between pastor and flock, friends in the fellowship of God, between guests at the same altar, penitents and their guides, mourners and the messengers of consolation,—all these make up an inner world of beauty fairer than the fairest aspect of this outward creation. We may a little understand what St. Paul meant when he said, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" and what they felt who "sorrowed most of all for the word which he spake, that they should see his face no more."[1]

Feeble and earthly as we are, the love of earthly friends and the company of others as weak, or weaker than ourselves, is very soothing. We bear each other's burdens, are blind to each other's faults; we make allowances, give dispensations, lower ourselves to each other's weakness, and create a sort of unexacting, compassionate world, in which we help and soothe each other's sorrows and infirmities. This is wonderfully healing and grateful to our hearts when they are wounded, or bowed down, or galled by a sense of our own evils. We take refuge in each other, and in each other, for a while, forget ourselves. Even sorrows become sources of consolation, by unsealing the deepest

[1] Acts xix. 38.

affections, and laying foundations for the closest sympathies. All things bind together those that love God. Good things by the attraction of goodness; evil things by the force of evil. And the presence of God on earth, in which they "live and move and have their being," makes the very element of being, motion, and life to be one in all. Now, unless a man be dead to the world with the deadness of a solitary, he must feel these strong bonds of love; these links of our common humanity, purified by the Incarnation, that is, the sympathy of the mystical body of Christ. Even the professedly religious, though separate from all the world beside, are bound to their brotherhood with a peculiar intimacy and power of love. Indeed, as men become dead to the world at large, these inner bonds of love become more intense. In one sense, life has more blessedness in it to those who are most dead to its allurements. That is to say, it is that very deadness which makes their perception of what is of God in the communion of the faithful so sensitive and keen.

Here, then, is another reason why Christians cannot but fear death. It strips them of a multitude of well-known, long-tried, and familiar joys. When they feel their summons, they begin to look abroad, and to call up round about them all the persons and the faces in whom they delight; the

seasons of holy fellowship, whether in joy or sorrow, the mutual service of love, the acts and the thoughts of united worship, of solace, aspiration, and hope.

There is something cheerless and solitary in the thought of going out from this home of their spiritual life, and faring forth, one by one, into the valley of the shadow of death. The thought of such perfect isolation is full of awe. I am, of course, speaking only of the world we leave, not that to which we go, of which it will be time to speak hereafter. We know our present state, with all its sorrows and trials, to be blessed and soothing. We know not to what we may be going. This state is certain; that, to us, uncertain. And to let go all our certain enjoyments which have supported us these many long years, from our earliest consciousness, through every trial of life—to go out, as it were, from our kindred and our father's house all alone into the uncertain shadows of the grave, is mournful and amazing. It appeals peculiarly to what is human in us, to the vivid emotions and sensations of earthly though purified hearts; they still sympathise with life and its imperfect realities, with its sensible beauty and its visible affections. This is another reason why the approach of death comes with terror even upon religious minds.

5. And, lastly, it may be objected, that in what

has just been said, the thought of the rest and bliss of heaven ought not to have been excluded. It may be said, Why dwell on the beauty of earth, when the departing are on their way to the glory of heaven? Why speak of earthly affection and peace, when they are advancing to the love and rest of God? Why of loneliness, when to depart is to be with Christ and all His saints? The reasons are two: first, because whatever judgment may result by comparing them together, it is nevertheless certain that the earthly state is in itself absolutely and positively an object of love. For instance, what dying father ever left wife and children without a sensible sorrow? Even St. Paul said, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."

But the other and the truer reason is this, that the reality of the eternal world is so severe and high, that, blessed though it be, it is in itself a thought of awe, from which, while we desire it, we cannot but also shrink.

Let any one try to realise what it would be, in any solitary place, as in a twilight church, or at any late hour, as in the night, when he is in prayer with every desire and thought of his heart in its most fixed intention,—let him conceive before him the form of Him who came and stood in the midst

when the doors were shut, or the presence of an holy angel, or the countenance of the most beloved among departed saints ; even though such a vision should approach with all the tokens of tender, compassionate love, with the condescensions and humiliations of a Divine pity, would it not smite us to the earth as dead? Such a meeting of our earthly consciousness with their exalted spirit would almost break down the powers of the mind and of life. What, then, must be that change, when the eyes which close upon nurses and weeping friends, and the ministries of pity, shall open upon an "innumerable company of angels," the "Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and God the Judge of all?" We may trust that in the passage, God, through His tenderness, will endow the soul with a firmness of spiritual sight and being which shall endure the revelation of majesty and glory. But judging, as we must, by the conditions and presumptions of our present consciousness, we must be penetrated with a sense of the unutterable dread which must attend on such a transit. Blessed as these things are in themselves, they are blessed only to those who are in a spiritual capacity to perceive and embrace their blessedness. And is this our state? On what do we found our belief that we are meet for this vision of eternal light? Surely, if we know ourselves, and the clinging sympathies

with which we hold to the infirmities of life, we must confess that nothing but new spiritual endowments will suffice to sustain us under this effluence of the Divine glory. In saying this, nothing is detracted from the love, tenderness, compassion of our Divine Lord, and of God, who is love. I am speaking only of that Majesty before which the beloved disciple fell as dead; of the unimaginable awe with which even the least of all saints and the last of the angelic hosts would strike us. How much more the whole hierarchy of heaven, the gathered election of God's people, the visible presence of the Word made flesh, the uncreated splendour of the Godhead!

These seem to be some of the reasons why the thought of dying is so alarming at first to all. Can it be otherwise when you are brought to say, "Now it is *my* turn; now He has sent for *me;* now all my life is at a stand; all things fall off from me as if they had nothing in me: I seem to stand alone, and no one can come near me; the kindest friend cannot so much as touch me now; my soul has withdrawn itself out of his reach into my inmost self; and there is only one thought upon which I can throw myself, and that is, the love of God in His Son Jesus Christ. My sinfulness overwhelms me; I am full of fear that I have been flattering myself, and that my soul

in God's sight has ten thousand stains where I see one; that where I remember ten, I have forgotten ten thousand times ten thousand. But now the time of repentance and self-chastisement is over: all that can be done for eternity is done for ever; and on the strength of this most imperfect preparation, I must go and hear the sentence of my everlasting lot. It is fearful to lie down upon a death-bed, and to give up myself to the power of corruption. Who knows what may be the last straits and anguish of my passage? Even He who gave Himself for me shrunk from the sharpness of death. 'I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.' Moreover, it is sad to go alone from all I hold so dear; and my whole soul shrinks from the realities of the world unseen. To dust and ashes, to a worm, and a sinner, such as I, it is terrible to die. 'My heart is disquieted within me, and the fear of death hath fallen upon me.'"

I do not know that there is either religion or safety in trying to throw off such thoughts as these. They are plainly real and true. They are evidently founded both on revelation and on the consciousness of our regenerate nature. Their office is, to penetrate us with a holy fear, which is akin to abasement, to pure and humble confession, to devout and earnest prayer, and to a repentance

both perfect in its extent, and fervent in its spirit. On this fear of death is raised the best and surest preparation for our last passage. The more we feel it, the more we realise in truth the change that is before us. Above all things, then, let us avoid false comforts, which excite the heart, and make the pulses beat for a while with a fictitious hope. Let us avoid all high feelings, and attempts to persuade ourselves that we are what we are not; that God is not what He is; and that the first meeting of a sinner with Him can be any thing but awful. If there is one thing more essential than any other to deep repentance, true peace, and to a holy death, it is perfect truth, perfect reality in these first perceptions. They are surely gifts of God, issuing out of the dictates and discernment of our spiritual consciousness. Let us thoroughly receive them into our heart; and though they brood in darkness, from the sixth hour unto the ninth, over the whole face of our soul, we may be sure, without a wavering of doubt, that in His good time we shall, through the darkness, see the Cross, and upon it the Son of God, pierced for us, our spotless sacrifice, our perfect atonement with the Father.

SERMON XX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF DEATH.

PHILIPPIANS i. 23.

"I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

LET us never forget whose words these were, and what he was who spoke them. They are the words of a saint and an apostle, at the end of a long life of love and patience for Christ's sake. After he had suffered the loss of all things,—name, honour, reputation, friends, rest, and home,—and for thirty years had borne stonings and the scourge, shipwreck and the daily peril of death, he could well say, "I have a desire to depart." With a great sum obtained he this freedom. It is well to remember this, that we be not either cast down at our conscious inability to speak as he did, or, what would be much worse, tempted to use such words

too soon. For us humbler thoughts are more in keeping. Nevertheless, the same desire which was so ardent in him may be kindled in our hearts. If we cannot burn with love, the flax may at least smoke. In our shallow capacity, and at a distance not to be measured, we may desire with fear what he yearned for with such unclouded longings. His desire is, at least, to us an example of what ours ought to be; and as such we may set it before us as a pattern.

With this view, then, let us consider what are the reasons for this desire. They must needs be quick and powerful, not only to cast out the fear of death, but to change it into aspiration. And in so doing, we will take, not the special reasons peculiar to martyrs and apostles, but such as are universal, and within the spiritual reach of all who are born again through Christ.

Why, then, should departure out of this life be an object of desire to a Christian?

1. First, because it is a full release from this evil world. There is something very expressive in the word we here render by 'depart.' It means the being set free, after the breaking up of some long restraint; or the unyoking of the oxen wearied with the plough; or the weighing again of our anchors for a homeward voyage. On every side its associations are full of peace and rest. What can

better express the passage of Christ's servants from this tumultuous and weary world? The longer we dwell in it, the more cause we must see to shrink from its temptations. I speak not only of sickness and pain, of crosses and hardship, bereavements and afflictions, and the bitterness of adversity; these are sensible evils, which all men desire to be rid of. Sometimes they even revile their tardy life, because they are impatient of the rod. To be free from all trial would be indeed blessed. But these are not the things which make true Christians desire to depart. They look on them as part of their Master's Cross, and count themselves happy to bear so much as its shadow. Their true affliction is the presence of sin; its fiery assaults without, its alluring subtilty within.

Is it not wonderful that men who immoderately fear death, should have no fears of life? To die, is in the last degree alarming to many; but to live, is as free from alarm as if it were impossible to fall from God. This shews us how little we realise the world in which we are, and the sin which dwells in our hearts. Is it possible that we can be so blind to the snares which are on every side? Are the nets of the fowler so frail that we have no fear of them, or so fine that we cannot see where they lie? Is it not certain that no man can promise to himself the gift of perseverance; and that

all his life long, the enmity of the world, the flesh, and the devil, "the blast of the terrible ones, is as a storm against the wall?"[1] Do we not console fathers and mothers who weep over the early death of children, by telling them that their young spirits are sainted, and that God has, in mercy, come between them and the defilements of this naughty world? We bid them remember, that in a few short years those they mourn might have lost their baptismal innocence, and sullied their fresh purity of heart. We bid them be consoled because now they know that their loved ones are safe, following "the Lamb whithersoever He goeth;" and God alone could foresee what might have been the career and end of a longer life. And what does all this mean but that this is a perilous world and full of evil? Who, then, shall dare not to fear it? Who can say into what he may fall, or how he may be led astray; how he may fall into the snare of the enemy, or under the illusions of his own mind? what declensions, what spiritual deteriorations may wither us from the very root? Indeed, we shall not be safe if we leave off to fear any peril to the salvation of the soul. So long as we are in this warfare, we must be open to the shafts of evil; and who would not desire a shelter where no arrows can reach us any more? What must be the peace of

[1] Isaiah xxv. 4.

having put off this mystery of probation; when the struggle and the strife shall be over, and breathless, panting hope, dashed by ten thousand fears, shall be changed into a certainty of peace, into a foretaste of our crown! This one thought alone is enough to make death blessed. Let us muse, as we say to ourselves, "I shall then be landed on the everlasting shore, no more again to fear any fall from God. All will be changeless and eternal." Nay, putting all this aside, who will not yearn to be free from the disorder and contradiction of a world that has rebelled against God, and "crucified the Lord of glory?" Is this a home for any soul that is united with Him in love? So long as He wills, it is our home, not of choice but of obedience, not of desire but of patience. Our Lord has said, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." So long as He wills, we remain content.

But it is an awful sentence: "Every man that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This is to tell us that the world is unchangeably at enmity with God. A man need only declare himself on God's side, to bring the world upon him. But even this power and kingdom of the devil is our discipline of patience and perfection, of suffering and submission. It is the school of

martyrs and of saints. Nevertheless, to depart from it, by the will of God, is blessed. And besides all this, what is our life on earth at best, but a life of clouds and shifting lights; that is, of trust, and faith in mysteries, of which we see only the outer surface? A veil is spread over the face even of the Church, through which the realities of the hereafter are faintly discerned. There is, indeed, a special benediction on all who believe without seeing; and yet the blessing is still greater of those who, having believed, afterwards behold; for the reward of faith is vision. Strange as it may seem, the greatest earthly solace and the most humbling thoughts come hand in hand. When we are in the sanctuary, there, if any where on earth, we have peace. And yet it is there we are taught, by visible sacraments and a veiled presence, that we are impotent and sinful; unable and unworthy to see His face. Our highest boon is a memorial of our fall. Our own hearts, with many tongues, bear witness of our sin, and of our unworthiness to touch His feet. Even in repentance we tremble, lest our repentance be found wanting; in our most recollected prayers we are half insensible and half unconscious; in our purest obedience our hearts throb with a multitude of thoughts; our faith, hope, charity, are all tinged with emotions of self; our most intent communion, even at the altar, is

faint and fleeting. We see the outlines and the order of the heavenly court rather by the imagination than by the vision of the spirit. And our whole earthly life, even at best, is weariness and twilight, strife and conscious infirmity, great hopes and greater fears, high intentions and bare fulfilments, dust and ashes, and conscious exile from the enjoyment of God. Well may evangelists say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly;" and souls already martyred, like St. Paul, desire to depart. Even to us it may be permitted to feel our hearts beat thick with hopeful and longing fear, when we wait for the voice which shall say to the least of penitents, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for, lo, the winter is past:"—sorrow and sin, anguish and cold fear, dark days and lingering nights, penance after sins, and sins after repentance, dim faith and failing perseverance—all these are past; "the rain is over and gone." "Come with me from Lebanon; look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon,"[1] unto the everlasting hills and to the eternal years.

2. Thus far we have spoken of the desire to depart which springs from a longing to be set free from sorrow and an evil world; from the temptations and burdens of mortality, which weigh upon

[1] Song of Sol. ii. 10, 11; iv. 8.

the soul. But these are the nether, not the upper springs of such desires. St. Paul thrice desired of the Lord that the thorn in the flesh might depart from him; and yet it was not to leave this behind that he desired to depart. His were positive longings for the fruition of bliss. And in his second Epistle to the Church in Corinth, he has fully uttered his desire. "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: *not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon*, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."[1] His desire was for the spiritual body raised in power and incorruption at the day of Christ; and, meanwhile, for that personal perfection in measure and foretaste, which is prepared for those who die in the Lord, and await His coming.

What is the misery and the burden of a fallen nature, we know. What a yoke is our own unwillingness to serve God;—that strange self-contradiction, in which we intend what we do not fulfil, and begin what we leave undone, and desire what we

[1] 2 Cor. v. 1-4.

shrink from. We will, and we will not. We have, as it were, two wills; like the fable of the two serpents which preyed on either side of a man's heart; a will divided against itself; its superior part decreeing obedience, its sensitive shrinking from the task. What a mystery is personal imperfection, and the image of God upon which it fastens. Who does not desire to be unclothed, and yet still more "to be clothed upon?" Is it not strange that the sick should shrink from perfect health; that they should be so enamoured of decay, that they are unwilling to be whole? Perhaps it is that we do not, and cannot, realise the thought that we shall one day be without sin; that, in the kingdom of God, our whole soul and our whole being will be in as perfect and pure a harmony with God as the hosts of angels. It seems a dream, or the imagination of a heated brain, that we who have sinned, as we bitterly remember, who have walked in wilful darkness, soiling ourselves to the very seat of life, and making our whole being an energetic discord with the holiness of God;—I say, it sounds as something of almost presumptuous aspiration, to conceive that, one day, we shall be in body deathless, and in soul without a spot. Verily we are "like unto them that dream;" but it is as the dream of prophets, full of truth and God. We may say to

ourselves, "Through the tears of repentance, and the blood of the Cross, there will come a time when I shall love God with all my strength, and His saints even as myself; when my whole desire will be His glory, and my whole energy His praise; when the vision of His presence shall be my endless peace, and to adore Him my ineffable delight. In that sphere of bliss all consciousness of self will be extinct; and in the blessedness of others I shall find my bliss. To contemplate the glory of His elect, and to sit beneath their feet, will be more blissful then, than to be exalted is alluring now." O wonderful mystery of love! To forgive all our guilt is beyond our understanding; to change our corruption into the purity of angels is almost beyond our faith. Who would not desire the struggle of death to be over, that he might be perfect? who would not long, if only he could believe his sins forgiven, to go and to be sinless in the kingdom of God? What thought more intensely joyful, what so inspiring to the holiest of God's servants? what more full of strength and solace to the tempted and the penitent? If St. Paul had a desire to depart, whose whole soul was under the sway of an ardent and holy will, what ought to be our desire of release from the dominion of corruption? Surely of all earthly sorrows sin is the sharpest. The heaviest of all burdens is the bondage of a will

which makes God's service a weary task, and our homage of love a cold observance.

3. And this leads to another reason why to depart is blessed. It unites us for ever with the new creation of God. It is for this that the world has waited, and the whole creation groaned and travailed in pain together. What is this new creation, but the new heavens and the new earth, in which are gathered the whole order and lineage of the second Adam; all saints from Abel the just, of all ages and times, in the twilight and the day-spring, in the morning and the noontide of grace; all made perfect, whether on earth or in rest, by the omnipotence of love? This is our true home; where all our reason, all our desires, all our sympathies, and all our love, have their perfect sphere and their full repose.

In this life, even the best things are crossed and marred with imperfection. We are sensibly in exile from some state for which our souls are craving, though still unprepared. What is the fastest friendship, the most intimate union, the fondest love, to the unity of saints? What is our best earthly state, but the sum of our individual imperfections? and what the condition of the blessed, but a perfection in which all are, therefore, perfect? Can we think, without an awful feeling of delight, that we shall enjoy the vision of those friends of

God who are exalted in the hierarchy of His love; that we shall not only behold, but love them with a love we as yet have never known for friend or child? It makes our hearts thrill even to read their names and their deeds in holy writ; what will it be to converse with them, to hear the very tones and accents which were heard in the wilderness and on Carmel, at Bethlehem and by Jordan, at Philippi and at Ephesus? If the savour of their lives, their words, their writings, even while they were imperfect here on earth, be so sweet to us, what shall their presence be when they and we are without spot or blemish? What a fellowship, and what grace that we may share it! We are bidden to that marriage festival. In all that host of hallowed souls, there will not be so much as one motion or inclining of the will from the will of God. All will be harmony. As the countless voices of the great deep unite in its majestic swell, so in the depth of life all living spirits shall be several, and yet one eternally. What shall it be to behold those who have been chosen of God to work together with Him in the salvation of the world; as witnesses and forerunners, as types of sanctity and the Cross, as stones of foundation,—yea, even to minister, under the shadow of the Holy Ghost, as she the ever-blessed Mary of her very substance to the incarnation of the second

Adam? We believe these things, and we confess them in chants and creeds; but how little do we lay to heart, that one day, if, through the adorable passion of our blessed Lord, we guilty may behold His face, we shall dwell among them in a fellowship of direct vision and love, as we dwell now among our kindred here on earth! O miracle of peace! How majestic and how glorious must be that heavenly court, in which the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, and all His ancients, patriarchs and prophets, apostles and evangelists, martyrs and saints, are gathered in sanctity and love! We cannot but shrink with fear at the thought of their perfection and our sin; and feel that, if we were suddenly called, we should have no sympathy with them, nor they with us. And yet there would be sympathy with us, and love—even there, even in the presence of eternal glory, among the hosts of the blessed. For will not every redeemed soul live each in the other's joy? Will not our own lamented and beloved be there, in the array of happy spirits? Will they not hail, if we reach the shore, our coming with delight? Do they not remember us now, even in the sight of God? For to see His face does not extinguish but perfect all holy loves. God's love gathers up and perfects all pure love like His own, all love that is for His sake. When we meet our beloved in Him, we

shall both know and love them so as we have neither loved or known before. Even earthly happiness will be renewed in its absolute perfection, and made eternal in the fruition of God. If to dwell among the holy and loving, the wise and tender, be blessed; then most to be desired is that change which shall carry us thither, where the lowest is an angel of God. We do not enough realise this blessed mystery, "the communion of saints." If we meditate upon it, we shall see that the highest force of the second great commandment of love must bind us above all to love the saints departed. For they are the holiest, the most endowed with grace, the nearest, the most familiar with God. On them, next after Him, our love, by the law of its own perfection, must repose. Blessed exchange, to pass from the tumultuous imperfection of the visible Church, to the stillness and perfection of the Church beyond the grave.

If only the heavy consciousness of guilt were lifted off, what should make us tarry here? What hopes or what hereafter, what aspirations or what schemes, what powers or what gifts of life, would make us rather linger for one day than enter the home of the redeemed, the rest of the saints of God?

4. But lastly, and above all, let us take St. Paul's full words. He did not only say, "I have

a desire to depart;" but also, "and to be with Christ." This is the true fountain of heavenly joy. "To be with Christ;" that is, with Him who is "altogether lovely,"[1] and beautiful before the sons of men:—to be with Him who loves us; whom also we love again; who loves us with a love above all human intensity, and whom we love in turn, if we dare so speak, with a love before which all human affections melt away. If, indeed, we could say this, if only we dared to think that we could leave all and lose all for love of Him:—if this were so, then the thought of departure would be blessed. Then we might say, "Life and God's world are beautiful: the light of the sun is sweet, friends are dear, and home is more sweet than all; but there is One more beautiful, more sweet, more loved; and to Him I desire to go, with Him to be." If we could say this, if we could feel it in the inmost soul of our heart. To be with Him, to see His face, to follow Him whithersoever He goeth; to be conscious of His eye; to hear, it may be, His words of love; to see the gathered fruit of His Passion in the glory of His elect; to be filled with a living consciousness that the work of His love has been for ever made perfect in ourselves: what, if not this, is heaven? It is only our dull love of this

[1] Song of Sol. v. 16.

world, or our blindness of heart, or, alas, our consciousness of penetrating guilt, which makes this desire of saints a thought of fear to us. We fear the meeting of our darkness with His light, not knowing what may be revealed both in us and against us. But for this, how blessed to go to dwell in Him for ever!

What, then, shall we do to make ready for that hour? There is one thing which is enough. Let us go to Him now. Let us live in Him by holy obedience, and by continual prayer. It is prayer that makes us love and desire His presence unveiled. If we knew that He was on earth, sitting "at meat in the house," should we dare to go to Him? What should we do? should we not desire and yet fear to go? Would not our hearts beat backwards and forwards, with a trust in His exceeding tenderness, and a "horrible dread" of our own guilt? Should we not desire, and, at last, should we not dare to go and stand behind Him, —not to meet His eye, as unworthy to come into His sight, but to draw near to Him in shame and tears? Would it not be a consolation to be in His presence? Should we not feel ourselves half forgiven, shielded altogether from the power of sin, if it were only by being where He is? It is strange what relief we feel from fears when we come into the presence of those we dread. It seems to take

off half the terror, by taking away all the waiting and foreboding. Would He cast us out? He has said Himself, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Would He say, Thou art a sinner? Would He say, Touch Me not? Would He not rather say, Come unto Me. Thou art heavy-laden, but thou art wounded with fear and sorrow. Thou art sincere at last; come, and sin no more. —So may we trust it will be hereafter. Perhaps the poor Magdalene little thought to kiss His feet, when she first drew near to Him. She came to anoint them in reverence; but His love cast out her fear. So it may be with you, when the word is brought, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." At first, thick bursts of fear beat full upon the heart, and life seems to come down like a waterflood, in an overwhelming consciousness of sin; it seems impossible that you should see His face and live. But we may trust that He will so inspire us with the persuasion of His love to sinners, that we may insensibly draw near, until we are bold in faith to touch, even to embrace, His feet, in silent and imploring faith. Let this be your daily preparation for departure. Strive to live in a perpetual readiness to die; and this you shall attain, if you learn to love His presence now. If you go to Him even saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" or,

"I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof:" or if you come day by day, trembling to "touch so much as the hem of His garment," He, of His tender compassion, will breathe into your hearts an abasing trust in His forgiveness, and a fervent desire of His presence. What but sin makes you to shrink from the thought of your departure? And if your sin were blotted out, what could make you endure to linger here?

SERMON XXI.

THE SNARE OF THE WORLD AND THE DRAWING OF CHRIST THE TWO GREAT ANTAGONISTS.

Song of Solomon i. 4.

"Draw me, we will run after Thee."

These are the words of the Church praying to be drawn to the presence and vision of Christ. They express the love a faithful soul bears to Him for His holiness and His passion, and a desire to be drawn more and more into fellowship with His sanctity and His Cross,—a desire, that is, to walk the way of the imitation of Christ. But they express more than this desire: they confess also our spiritual impotence and our spiritual slowness to follow Him. "Draw me," for alone I cannot move a foot; I cannot begin my course: in me there is no power to originate: all comes from Thee, both to will and to do, to desire and to begin.

It is also to be noted that the Church here

says, "Draw me, we will *run*," as implying with what a fervent affection and kindling heart it would put forth all its strength to do the will of Christ, revealed in His gift of preventing grace. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word."[1] This is first a cry of distress under the clog and hindrance of an earthly and sluggish nature, and then a pure aspiration, mixed with intense desire to speed into His presence. There is in it a tone like the words of St. Peter when he first refused to suffer his Master to wash his feet, and then, lest he should lose his part and lot in Him, eagerly desired more: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head;"[2] or as when he said, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake."[3] It is such a longing as we may believe the beloved disciple had, when Peter turned and saw him following, and our Lord said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"[4] such an aspiration as they all felt within when He "led them out as far as to Bethany, and lifted up His hands and blessed them, and . . . while He blessed them . . . was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."[5] Each one, as he looked up stedfastly and worshipped, said, (no doubt, in

[1] Ps. cxix. 25. [2] St. John xiii. 9. [3] Ib. 37.
[4] St. John xxi. 23. [5] St. Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

his heart,) "Draw me, we will run after Thee." And this has been the longing desire of the Church in every age from then till now. There has been in the midst of this rough world, and under the soiled array of the visible Church, a deep and living pulse beating with love for Christ, yearning and panting as the hart for the water-brooks.

This is the perfect and blessed life of a Christian upon earth; a state very high, far above our heads, though, God be praised, not out of our reach. If we were left to scale these ascents of love and peace in our own slothful weakness, they would indeed be unattainable; but it is He that "maketh our feet like hart's feet," and carries us up to walk with Him "on high places." There is no measure of love, joy, peace, light, gladness, fellowship with Him, to which He will not draw and exalt those that seek Him in humility.

Now the spiritual life has three states, through which all who attain to the love of Christ seem to pass; and these states are so marked that we may take them one by one. Although to every soul born again by the Spirit of Christ He may say, as He said of old, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee;"[1] although this loving

[1] Jerem. xxxi. 2.

attraction of His Spirit has been all through life drawing each one of us to Himself, yet we, by our backward and reluctant hearts, have kept far away, or followed with a slow and struggling will. We are between two objects of love, two attractive forces; as if two loadstones, one seen, and one unseen, were playing upon us. Let us see how it has been with us.

1. First, I suppose that most can remember a time when we were drawn so strongly to the world that the drawing of Christ's love and Spirit was overbalanced by a more powerful attraction.

Happy are they who have no memory of actual sin, and of its clinging hold, by which they were once kept in bondage. The most dreadful part of sin is its sweetness, by which it fascinates even those who know its hatefulness and shame. It mocks a sinner while it destroys him. It unbinds all his resolutions, loosens his strictest intentions, relaxes his firmest purposes, and changes him, with his eyes open, from a half-penitent to a fool. To pass by all other examples, take such a sin as anger. Before the temptation it is hateful: during the temptation, to indulge it is positively sweet. It gratifies a strong present impulse, as abundant food cloys a hungry palate. An angry man goes on word after word, reply after rejoinder, lash after lash, with a sensible and increasing elevation of

spirit. He revels in it. For a time every thing is lost in the swell and sway of his excitement. It adds strength, vividness, and eloquence to his thoughts and words, which delight him. In a moment all the promises, rules, and prayers of years, it may be, are scattered and forgotten. In another moment he stands alone, stung to the quick at his own folly. No reproof can go beyond the rebukes he lays upon himself, no contempt exceed his own. Why did he not feel it a few minutes before? A little sooner would have saved him. But sin is sweet, and it draws steadily and smoothly, as the shoal-water of a whirlpool, with an imperceptible and resistless attraction. One such sin will overbear the meek and gentle drawing of Christ. Such a man needs no more than this one bond to keep him fast bound to this dying world. So it is with every sin. Take them one by one: change only the terms, and the same outline will serve for all. In such hearts the love of Christ takes no root: for them His holiness has no beauty, His passion no sharpness of compunction.

But we will pass to another kind of state. I mean, the state of those who love the pleasures, rank, honours, riches, refinement of the world. These things, free as they are from necessary evil, are among the most subtil and tenacious snares. Unnumbered souls perish in their meshes. Thou-

sands struggle in vain to get beyond the sphere of their attraction. But their power of allurement is only less than the power of the Spirit of God: far too great for the infirmity of man. It is wonderful how fast worldly people are held; how the world embraces them, and weaves its arms about their whole being. "The children of this world are," indeed, "in their generation wiser than the children of light:" for except in a few, where do we ever see such intense, concentrated, energetic, loving devotion as in aspiring and ambitious men, in the hunters after popularity, and the traffickers in gold? The human character is in them exhibited in all its range, versatility, and unity of force. They lack but one thing. They are "without God in the world."[1] And the world has them for its own with a quiet and unchallenged possession. No drawings of Christ's truth or Spirit make them waver or vibrate for a moment. The game is up, and their spoil before them. They plunge deeper and deeper into the manifold and multiplying attractions of the world, until their freedom of action is stolen from them, and their will ceases to be their own.

And, further than this, we may take an example which comes nearer to ourselves. It is not only the greater sins, or the worship of the world,

[1] Ephes. ii. 12.

which hold us back against the drawing of Christ; but the soft pure happiness of home, the easy round of kindly offices, the calm and blameless toil of a literary life, the gentler and more peaceful influences of earthly cheerfulness:—all these too, with the lights and shades, the anxieties and joys which fall across an even path, steal away the heart, and wind all its affections about a thousand moorings. Happy men drop their anchors into the quiet waters of life; the very smoothness of its surface lulls them, and a conscious innocence makes them fearless. This world is very fair; and the elements of peace and joy still bear the marks of a Divine hand; so that we love them freely and with fondness. A great part of such a life rests on duty, and is blameless; it has therefore nothing to awaken a suspicion that the world is nearer to the soul than God. How many homes, how many families, how many hearts, how many parents and children, husbands and wives, brethren and friends, even pastors of Christ's flock, does this describe!

But these fascinations are dangerously strong; they so fill the eye and heart, that little is desired more, and nothing is sought with earnestness beyond. Such people are often, indeed almost always, up to a certain measure, religious; but often not devout. They are pure, but not zealous;

afraid of sin, but without compunction. They think they fear the world, while they love its happiness; and so hope to escape the danger of its allurements: they fear to offend God's holiness rather than His love; and by this pious fear disguise from themselves their want of fervour. They serve God from conscience, not because it is their joy. His worship is a cool and satisfying duty; but neither sweetness nor delight. The vision of life is lovely and vivid; the outline of heaven veiled and dim: their enjoyment of life is present and sensible; the thought of death bitter, as an end of happiness, and fearful, as an entrance upon a state unknown. To sum this up in one true word, such people love the world more than they fear it, and fear God more than they love Him. The attraction is greater on one side, and the repulsion is all on the other. What a searching point of reality and truth there is in the words of the son of Sirach: "O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things!"[1] I have been describing no evil or irreligious character; but one which, to a great extent, is Christian. In all the duties of the second table they are strict and sincere; but towards God their

[1] Ecclus. xli. 1.

conscience is clear and cold. The warmth, pulse, and tide of life sets towards the visible objects of affection. This is a state in which it is hard to die. They are little prepared, either for so great a wrench, or for so high and awful a meeting with their Lord and Judge.

2. Let us take the next state. It may be that by sorrow, or chastisement, or by some other of His manifold strokes of love, it has pleased God to break or to relax these bonds, and to dispel the vain show in which they walked. Let us suppose that the world has lost its attractive power, and draws them but feebly to its centre. Little by little they get weaned from their stronger attachments. They see less fairness, and no stability in its best gifts; they have found its insecurity; and its sounds, even the most glad, ring hollow. They are not soured or fretful, nor love friends less, nor brood upon any disappointment, nor wince under any cross; but they have found out the emptiness of all that is not eternal, and the poverty of all that will not satisfy the soul. In this state they break, one by one, through the old attractions of life; they withdraw themselves to the outer sphere of its influence, where it plays feebly upon them, not as yet wholly escaping; sometimes for a while falling under it more fully again, and retracting in their escape: but upon the whole, the world draws them

less, and the presence of Christ attracts them more. Still, the most that can be said is, that they begin to fear the world more, and love it less; and to fear the presence of Christ less, and to love Him more. After all, it is but a mingled state, a sort of mottled sky, neither the cold of winter nor the sun of summer; a dubious, veering, inconstant temperature between love and fear, life and death. If life does not draw them, death affrights them; though they have lost their fondness for earth, they have not attained a yearning for heaven. The fresh, calm repose of life is more soothing to them than the thought of the heavenly court, ardent with love, and arrayed in the glory of God. From this they draw back, both with conscious incapacity of such exalted bliss, and with a sense of personal sin. They are intellectually convinced of the blessedness of a life "hid with Christ in God," and that there is no true happiness but to dwell in His love. Their whole life takes a new direction; they recast it upon the order of the Church, and with a direct intention to aim only at a holy resurrection. This disentangles them from a multitude of hindrances, and gives something of unity and purpose to their life. Their chief work, thenceforth, becomes the search and knowledge of their own state before God, their chief study His will, their chief rule of life the practice

of devotion. But there is yet one thing sensibly wanting: the love which "casteth out fear." The deliberate choice of their superior will, that is, of reason and conscience, is fixed upon the kingdom of God; but the feelings and affections of their hearts, that is, of their sensitive and inferior will, are lively and prone to relapse. Their whole religious life is to be sustained against a force which strongly keeps its hold; and the attractions of the unseen world are faint. They are convictions rather than affections; they work by reason rather than by love: and this accounts both for the slight and uncertain enjoyment they find in devotions, as in prayer and the holy Sacrament, and the continual resistance, both of body and spirit, which must be overcome before they can begin to pray.

Perhaps nothing so certainly proves how we are related to the unseen world as our prayers. If they be irksome and tedious, cold and tasteless, it is a sure proof that our delight is not in God, and that we love Him chiefly, if not only, in the reason; that we are living if not lives of sense, at best of intellect and of imagination, rather than of the will. So long as we are in this state, however much this world may lose its hold upon us, the next has not as yet won our hearts. The thought of entering it must be appalling; and the expectation of death full of fear.

And does not this describe the state of many who pass for devout, and believe themselves to be so, at least in desire? Such persons are in a balanced state between two attractions; of which, if the one be weaker, it is the nearer and the more sensibly perceived. This condition is at times dreary and overcast, and cannot last long. It must incline one way or the other. Either the world, by almost unperceived reaction, gets its hold again, or God in His mercy multiplies the power of His grace, and draws them almost unwilling to Himself. Whether it be by larger measures of His Spirit, shedding abroad His sensible love, or by fresh visitations of merciful discipline, matters not. Whatsoever draws us out of the range of worldly desires, and within the sphere of His heavenly kingdom, the issue is all one. It turns the scale, and "we run after" Him.

3. And this leads on into the third and last state, in which the balance is so turned against this world, that it can allure no longer; and the hope of God and His kingdom attracts alone. He has unnumbered ways in which He thus draws us to Himself. Sometimes it is by a flood of blessings, wakening the whole heart to gratitude and praise; sometimes by revelations of His truth, overwhelming the soul with light; sometimes by a word read in silence, or spoken to us, which wounds like a

shaft of fire; sometimes by the overflowing grace of the holy Sacrament, or by such a spiritual perception of the Cross as fills the heart with love and sorrow: besides all these, He has ministries, operations, and agents, countless as the angels of light. In some of these special ways He is often pleased to break the bonds of this world, and to draw His servants once for all under the abiding attractions of the world to come. Perhaps nothing does this so surely as a realisation of death.

There is great reason to doubt whether we ever realise what death is, till it comes home to ourselves. We may see it in others, and stand daily by dying beds; and yet it is with death as with bodily pain, we can all sympathise, but we cannot transfer it to ourselves. However familiar we are with the sights and sounds, the thoughts and fears of such a state, by seeing others die, it is only, as it were, by proxy. Such warnings are very wholesome, and dispose the mind to realise it, one day, for ourselves; but they can do no more. The consciousness that our time is come, and that we personally are going out of this world, is wholly incommunicable. That which makes it *our* consciousness, forbids its being shared by others. It is our own, because it is no other's. The consciousness of our personality is as our own life, which, though common in nature, is incommuni-

cable. So the thought of our own death; of our own personal appearing before God; our own personal account, judgment, destiny, — that which makes it different from all other perceptions is, that it is no other's but our own. When we have once realised this, a change passes upon all things: sin becomes hateful, the world fearful, earthly happiness pale, and almost undesired. One great reality absorbs all—eternity; and in eternity the vision of God and of Christ, the kingdom of saints, the bliss of the soul, the glory of the body, the judgment, the resurrection, the armies of the quick and dead;—this one mighty vision draws the whole soul into itself, and we seem caught up out of the bonds of flesh and earth, free into the air. Perhaps no other words will fully express the feeling. It is as if our feet rested upon nothing but the spiritual world; as if we saw nothing but the presence of God.

This thought once realised, may, indeed, be wholly lost again. We may taste the "powers of the world to come," and yet again fall away; but we are not now speaking of that danger, but of its direct opposite: the blessedness of such an awakening. It is as if our eyes were opened, or gifted with a twofold power of sight, and a reed were put into our hand "like unto a rod,"[1] to measure

[1] Rev. xi. 1.

happiness and life, sin and death, hope and fear, time and eternity, "the temple and the altar," the shadows which fall both upon the world and from it,—as if we were lifted into space beyond its path. How strangely do all things then change their magnitudes, and with them their force of attraction: what a new law of proportion and of power is seen to reveal itself on every side. Once we were in earnest for all manner of aims, objects, and schemes; we panted for this, were all energy for that undertaking; all on fire, all abroad: and now all is spoken in one calm word: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."[1]

But it is not the mere fading of earthly and transitory things. A mere loosening from this world would do little. It might make us sour and restless, bitter and complaining, or even haters of mankind and enemies of God.

The true and blessed change wrought upon the heart is an awakened desire of God, by which He draws it to Himself. After much trembling and fear, penitent self-accusation, and sincere restitution, so far as they are able; after passing through the depths of a repentance, those whom God so blesses pass on, by faith in the blood of Christ, into a state of calm and cheer-

[1] Philip. iii. 11.

ful desire, which collects all the affections of the soul into one longing hope. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord." "This shall be my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have a delight therein." If they could venture, they would say, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better;" or, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

It seems at such a time as if they could never fall back into old channels, never go abroad again into this unreal world, never be in earnest for any thing of time, never bestow an hour or a care on any thing which is not eternal. The whole life of their heart seems brought to a focus in the desire of peace in heaven.

Let us now suppose that God in His mercy has brought any of you to this state; that He has borne with you when you loved the world, and served Him only with fear; that He has drawn you out of this spiritual death into the second state, where you hung in a dubious balance of attraction: let us suppose, I say, that He has, in love, broken your bonds asunder, and drawn you, by the full force of love and holy fear, unto Himself. How will you answer to this mercy? Sup-

pose yourselves awakened by some of His gracious visitations: what should you do?

1. First, it would be the plain will of God that you should strive with all your soul and strength to follow whither He is drawing you; that is, to prepare yourselves to dwell with Him for ever; and, as a first step to this, to put off all that weighs you down to earth. I need not say all sins, for we have been speaking only of those who have long ago, by God's grace, been cleansed of wilful sins. But there remains the burden of the past, the consciousness of sin dwelling in us, and much that is written in God's book against the judgment of the great day. Our first step must be to put this off, by an humble accusation of ourselves before Him. So long as sin has any part in us, the world retains a hold. It can light up fears, and so withdraw the soul from God. But confession fairly casts out the embers and the ashes of death; so that the world has nothing on which to cast its fires.

The next thing is, to offer up to God all pure affections, desires, regrets, and all the bonds which link us to home, kindred, and friends, together with all our works, purposes, and labours. These things, which are not only lawful, but sacred, become then the matter of thanksgiving and oblation. When He calls us, they can be ours no

longer; He has resumed what He lent, and we must yield them up. If we would hold them back, and dwell upon them, they would only disturb the balance of attraction, and make us draw backward to life again. Memories, plans for the future, wishes, intentions; works just begun, half done, all but completed; emotions, sympathies, affections: all these things throng tumultuously and dangerously in the heart and will. The only way to master them is, to offer them up to Him, as once ours, under Him, always His by right. In fact, as we would restore, at our last hour, all loans to their lawful owners, so we ought at all times to make restitution to God.

And after this we ought to awaken in our will the grace of faith, hope, and love, calling to mind all that He has done for us from childhood,—the pledges of His truth, goodness, and love to us. These things powerfully draw us on towards His unseen presence:—faith by realising His beauty, hope His mercy, and love His fatherly and pitiful compassion.

But when all this is done, there remains one thing still, the chiefest and best of all; which is, neither to go back in fear and misgiving to the past, nor in anxiety and forecasting to the future; but to lie quiet under His hand, trusting in the Cross alone, and having no will but His. This is

the greatest speed we can make to His presence; for he that has no will but God's will is not far from His kingdom; for "the kingdom of God is within" him.

2. But next suppose it to be God's will that you should be once more set free from the trial He has sent for your instruction: what shall you do? It is plainly His will that you should give your whole heart and strength to perpetuate and to perfect what you have learned, to the very end of life.

His visitation was sent either to prepare you for His presence, or for a life which should be spent in an habitual and ripening fitness for departing. So it pleases Him, as it were, to build up our earthly life in mercy, as once He ordained in displeasure, laying the foundations in sorrow, and setting up the gates in sickness; rearing it story upon story, every one resting upon some visitation of chastisement or warning. This is what He would have you learn now. He saw that you were still entangled in the world, deceiving others less than yourself with the belief that you were dead to it. He saw that your heart must be struck sharply on the cold flint, before it could give out fire, and kindle. He saw how much of truth hung suspended in vapour and imagination, and needed a rude touch, as from the presence of death, to fix it

in reality. He saw how much devotion had no deeper springs than in the reason, leaving the heart dry; how weak an allurement would draw you from His kingdom; how slack a love held you to His service. And all this He would heal, and send you back into life, to prove you once more upon a deeper law, and with a clearer insight into the realities of death and judgment. This is now your trial; to perpetuate your present spiritual perceptions; to shelter them from the breath of commonplace, which men call common sense, sobriety, and the like; and to keep them as keen and unearthly as you feel them now. Nay, more: your trial is not only to prolong your present convictions, but to carry them out and to perfect them by exercise and discipline, and the confirmation of habitual stedfastness. It will be a heavy and sad account if, twenty or ten years hence, when sorrow, or fear, or death comes near once more, you be taken unawares, or found no fitter than last time. Alas for us, if these things leave us on the same low level where they found us at the first,—if sorrows do not prepare us for affliction, and sicknesses do not make us ready to die; if, having once gone down midway into the cold waters, we stand next time trembling upon the bank, to begin all over again, with all the same infirmities and fears!

Now, to keep alive and to ripen the convictions and perceptions which God's mercy gives in such visitations, take these two counsels: first, to sustain in your minds the thoughts, and to perpetuate the prayers, rules, and practices you used while His hand was upon you. This, if any thing, under God, will keep up your inward state, and ripen it into an habitual consciousness. To this it will be well to add special commemoration of events and days. And the other counsel is, as far as you can, to take upon yourselves the special care and consolation of those who are led by the hand of God into the cloud through which He has once guided you. In them you will see the liveliest memorials of what you were, of your fears, pains, faults, anxieties, and weakness. You will learn how to humble yourselves; and you will know, by a special knowledge of sympathy, how to help and soothe them. The safest and most blessed life for you will be to make such as the poor and penitent, mourners, the sick and dying, your spiritual kindred, under our common Father; and to live in them and for them, in thanksgiving for mercies to yourself, and as a preparation for the hour which must come at last.

What a wonderful mystery of paternal love will be revealed at that day, when, from the kingdom of their Father, the elect shall see the virtues

which issued from the Cross to draw each one of them unto itself! What a twofold revelation of cold unwillingness and of divine charity! "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."[1] With the cords of Adam, with the sacred manhood of the Word made flesh, with the tenderness, pity, meekness, sympathy of our crucified Lord and God. Truly these are "cords of man and bands of love;" of love "which passeth knowledge," whose goings forth are from everlasting; whose virtues are infinite, whose patience is eternal. From every wound of His Divine manhood issues forth, as it were, a radiance of love, drawing the hearts of His elect into the fellowship of His passion. All through our life this effluence of grace has been shed abroad upon us; even in our sins, in our unconscious and turbulent worldliness, restraining, preventing, and at last converting us to Himself. Ever since that day, virtue and holy inspirations have gone out of Him, silently persuading and secretly attracting us nearer and nearer to the foot of the Cross. Even in our coldness, reluctance, relapses, He still held us fast. He knew us better than we knew ourselves, and the bands of love were still wound about us by His tender care. Little by little He has brought us where we stand now: between Him and us, if we

[1] Hosea xi. 4.

believe, there is but a veil, impervious to sight, to faith as open as the day. Happy they whom He has drawn to the horizon of this visible world, and there bid them wait in sustained and ripening preparation until their time shall come. Let us, then, say unto Him, "Lord, Thy cross is high and lifted up; I cannot in my own strength ascend it; but Thou hast promised, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'[1] Draw me, then, from my sins to repentance, from darkness to faith, from the flesh to the spirit, from coldness to ardent devotion, from weak beginnings to a perfect end, from smooth and open ways, if it be Thy will, to higher and holier paths; from fear to love, from earth to heaven, from myself to Thee. And as Thou hast said, 'No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him,'[2] give unto me the Spirit whom the Father hath sent in Thy Name, that in Him and through Him I being wholly drawn may hasten unto Thee, and 'go no more out' for ever."

[1] St. John xii. 32. [2] St. John vi. 44.

SERMON XXII.

THE GREAT BETROTHAL.

Song of Solomon ii. 16.

"My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

We need not go into the literal and historical interpretation of this Song of Songs. It is enough to know that "a greater than Solomon is here." It is a vision and a prophecy of one "falling into a trance, but having his eyes open;"[1] conscious, and not conscious; seeing, and not seeing, how great things he foreshadowed and spake. It is verily and indeed the song of Him who "loved" His spouse "the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."[2] This song is the in-

[1] Numbers xxiv. 16. [2] Ephes. v. 25-27.

effable communion of the Bridegroom and Bride, both in this wayfaring upon earth, and at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It utters, in human words, and by human figures and emotions, because spoken by man and addressed to man, things which surpass not only words but knowledge; realities of the spiritual world,—the instincts, energies, and consciousness of the soul. For these what language is deep or fine enough? what ear or eye can attain to those things which even the heart of man hath not conceived? They can be perceived only by the intuitions of the Spirit, and by a power of vision granted to us by God.

Such is the mystery of peace here expressed. "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." High as these words are, yet they are for all. Not only might His chosen disciple so speak, but the stained and penitent Magdalene, "for she loved much." Wonderful is His pity and compassion: the least may say this with the greatest. Even now in measure, as hereafter; for in the firmament of His kingdom, though "one star differeth from another star in glory," yet all are bright and pure: some burning with a ruddy and glorious light, in might and splendour; some pale and meek, in purity and softness; but all are hallowed, sainted, and beloved.

Let us see, then, what these few deep words

may mean. They express the bond or hold of love between Christ and His elect, whether they be saints or penitents, and they fasten it by a twofold strength. "My Beloved is mine;" and not this alone, but "I am His." At first sight these words might seem to change the order of love given by St. John, "We love Him, because He first loved us;" but it does not. The order is eternal, laid deep in the bosom of God, and cannot be changed. What, then, do these words express? They teach us:

First, that He is ours in the very sense in which we speak of our father or our child, our life or our own soul. There is nothing we possess, either without or within our inmost being, which is more our own than He is. He is our Maker, our Redeemer, our Helper, our Light, our Daily Bread, our Hope, and our Portion for ever. We may be stripped naked of all other things which are most our own; but of Him we can never be deprived, except we cast Him away. And how has He become ours? Not by deserving or earning, by finding or seeking; not by climbing up to Him, or taking Him for ours; but because He gave Himself to us. He gave us His truth, His holy sacraments, His promises; He gave us sight, power, reason, and life; and because He gave them, they are ours; ours in full, as if there were no other regenerate soul, no other illuminated heart, no other

intelligence, no other living spirit. We share an universal gift, which is whole in all, and perfect in every one; of which none can challenge our right, or rob us of our portion. So it is with Himself. He took our manhood, and was made one with us; and gave Himself for us as an atonement, and to us as a Saviour. Our possession of Him, therefore, is full and absolute, by His own "unspeakable gift."

But this does not reach up to the fulness of this mystery. He gave Himself to us as the bridegroom gives himself to the bride. It was an act of His love stooping to us, giving up, as it were, His right over Himself, and putting Himself into the power of His Church, so as to be Head to none other than to her. And this is why St. John says, "He first loved us." It was—it could only be—His own free choice; His own first advance; His own unsought, unknown love, by which He gave to His Church the dowry of Himself. In this mystery of love is summed up all that is inviolable, binding, and eternal. The force of this betrothal has all strength, human and divine. He will never draw back from it, or release Himself, or annul His vows, or cast us away. On His side this is impossible. The pledge of His love is everlasting, as His love itself. But not only is this a mystery of strength and of eternity, but of tenderness, care, pity, and

compassion. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."[1] These things are not to be explained away into figures and metaphors, or to be lowered by lax interpretations. They reveal great verities of the Spirit; eternal realities of the new creation. Husband never loved a wife; bridegroom, in the first gladness of perfect affection, never loved a bride, with a love so deep, fervent, tender, self-forgetting, as that love which binds the Son of God to the Church for which He died. The coldness of our natural heart, and the remote abstractions of reason, make us to content ourselves with a theory of God's love which belongs to the schools of philosophy, not to the revelation of the Gospel. But the love that is revealed to us in Christ, is all that is of God, with all that is of man. It is divine in its perfection, and human in its intimate embrace of our most vivid and tender emotions. "My Beloved is *mine*." He has so given, pledged, and bound Himself to me; He has so fulfilled, confirmed, and assured me of His bonds and pledges; that I ought sooner to doubt that He made me than that He loves me; that my own sight or soul are mine, than that He is mine; mine by every sense in which the word can be

[1] Ephes. v. 29, 30.

spoken; mine as my help, head, shelter, protection, guide, happiness, and everlasting rest.

2. And next, these words mean that, in giving Himself to be ours, He took us to be His own. "And I am His." It is a full contract, binding both, though made and accomplished by Himself alone. He created us when we were not; He redeemed us when we were dead in sin; He regenerated us when we were born in uncleanness; He called us by all the vocations of His truth and Spirit when we were unconscious, forgetful, or rebellious; He strove with us when we were impenitent; He converted us when we should have perished; He made Himself ours by a gift, and He has made us His own by the power of His Spirit. We are His, therefore, by every bond and title. We are bought, purchased, redeemed; we are pledged, vowed, and betrothed; but better than all these, He has made us to be His by the free, willing, and glad consent of our own heart. This is why we may call Him, "My Beloved." Because after all His miracles of creation and redemption, of our new birth and of His long-suffering, He has wrought one more, greater than all; He has made us to love Him in return. Who that remembers what he was in childhood, boyhood, and even the riper years of life; who that remembers the sins and provocations of his corrupted will, the

cold ingratitude and proud defiance of his rebellious heart; nay, who that knows what has been the frigid, reluctant, soulless religion of his seemingly devout and penitent life; but must wonder at the kindling of his own heart, as if the touch of an angel had brought fire out of a rock? It is nothing less than a miracle in the order of the new creation of God; and to be the subject of such a miracle is full of wonder and awe. It is no less a work of the Holy Ghost than the tongues of fire which sat upon the apostles in the day of Pentecost. What more wonderful than that we should begin to desire His love whom we habitually slighted; and to sorrow most of all that we cannot love Him again? Strange, that what was once without savour should now be sweeter than the droppings of the honeycomb; that our hearts should beat, and thrill, and tremble with the desire, not so much to be loved by Him as to love Him above all; that our chief disquiet should be our own loveless spirit, and our highest joy the least kindling of our soul towards Him. What is this but "a change from the right hand of the Most High?" The gift of love to Him is the greatest gift of all. If we have this one gift, though besides we have nothing, yet we have all things; though we had all things, without this we should have nothing. What a mystery of wonder is the company of His

elect; from righteous Abel to the Annunciation, and much more from that time unto this day. What is the inward life of that great company, of whom the world was not worthy? What was their aim, hope, and stay? What drew them out from home and kindred, and knit them into a new fellowship, —in the world but not of it,—neither a temporal state nor a retired household, but a kingdom wide as the earth, in every land, of every tongue, under every sky, always suffering, never failing, perpetually replenishing from some unseen source, outliving races and dynasties, awing and binding kings in chains, subduing the roughest wills, and changing the rudest natures,—what, I say, has been the secret life, energy, and power of this miracle of God, but the mystical union and marriage between Christ and His elect, "the love of" His "espousals," the divine virtue of these few words, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His?" This has been the strength of prophets and apostles; this has made martyrs, saints, and penitents; the love of Christ and His Church, uniting both in one flesh and one spirit, with one heart and will, in life and in death. This, then, is the plain meaning, shortly expressed, as needs must be, of these words. And they are full of all manner of consolation. For instance:

1. They interpret to us the whole discipline

of sorrow. It is most certain that, if it were not necessary for our very salvation, He would never send affliction. That we should be afflicted, is more against the tenderness of His love for us than against the delicacy of our love for ourselves. When it comes, it is a proof how much He loves us; so much, indeed, that He would rather afflict us than let us perish. Most of our sorrows are the close followers of positive sins. We draw them upon ourselves. And He, in His mercy, turns what we make penal into purification. Sometimes they are sorrows not in the order of nature but of providence; and are then laid on by Him to purge us of some spiritual disease, which, if left alone, must be our death. Such are the deadly sins and their chastisements.

But passing over these; the love He has to us, and the right to our undivided love, make Him impatient of our estranged affections. He is "a jealous God, even a consuming fire." And He will not endure that we should give to others or to ourselves what is due to Him alone. If you would take this as a key, it would open to you the darkest passages of your past life. He has been weaning you from irregular and excessive affections. After the love of gross sin is cast out, self and the world long hold their sway. Men love and aim at power, rank, reputation, wealth, high relations, great friendships;

or it may be they turn to intellect and literature, and to the subtil allurements of a purer and more refined self-love; or still more subtil, they take up even the sanctities of religion and of His service as the subject-matter of their energy and self-esteem, or of their repose and self-indulgent consolation. They love power over other minds, and the more so in proportion as that power is higher, purer, and more intense. They make to themselves thrones in the reason or the imagination, in the conscience or the heart of others. And what is sadder still, they use even the name, the person, and the passion of the Son of God as the occasion and material of ministering to their own service. This sounds very startling and sinful, and perhaps many may say that they are wholly innocent of it; indeed, perhaps few will confess themselves to be guilty. And yet, what is ambition, vanity, self-importance, whether worldly, literary, or spiritual, but this? The plain interpretation of such sins is, that they are a transfer of your affections from the heavenly Bridegroom to the world, or to yourselves. And this, in His love, He will not suffer. He will lay on the rod, stroke after stroke, till He has wakened you to know yourselves. He will never leave you till He make you to desire that you may be supplanted, dispossessed, dethroned in the heart of every crea-

ture, so that you may rest on His heart alone. Sharp as the discipline may be, and sick at soul as you must be under it, yet the time will come when you will feel it a sharper anguish to be conscious of any affection at variance with your love to Him; when you will sicken with a far deeper self-abasement at every feeling or thought which betrays the stubborn vividness of self-love.

There is something unutterably humbling in the inward consciousness of any one heart-sin, such as envy or vanity, which makes it impossible for us to rest sincerely and altogether in His love. Such sins shew at once that we have not passed out of ourselves, but that we are still festering in the very core of self. Now all these He will expel, one by one; gently if it may be, or all together, if it must be, by some overwhelming stroke. And besides this purgation of sins, He also will not cease to visit us till He restore unity and measure even to our pure affections. The order of love is, that we should love Him with all our soul, and others as ourselves. Such is the charity of Heaven; the love of blessed spirits round His throne. But with us, all is disorder and division. What is the order of our sensible and active love? We love first ourselves greatly, then our friends a little, and then God least of all. Therefore He will not stay His hand till all this be reversed. Hence come losses

and disappointments, baffled hopes, and a multitude of graves. The lesson must be learnt; and if you cannot learn it in a throng, you must learn it in solitude. He will be "the first and the last," the chief and all in your hearts; and that not for His own sake, but for yours. He will have you to draw out and realise the whole of your bond and betrothal with Him, that you may sit down with Him, and with all your beloved ones, at the great marriage supper. It is a good thing, then, to try ourselves often, and to ask, "If such or such a solace were taken away, could I stay myself upon His love? If I had none of these things, would He suffice me? If He should say, Keep all without Me; or give up all, and keep Me alone; which should I choose? If I could now leave all, and go to sit at His feet, would this be happiness?" If not, then let us not wonder if we be chastened. Let us not doubt His tenderness in afflicting. It is because He sees that, with this blessing or that happiness, with this friend or that child, you will never be able to say, "I am His." Therefore He makes your heart empty, that your love may gather itself again in strength, and fasten upon Him alone. Not only are His chastisements in love, but they are for love, for the sake of love. The final end is, that we may be made perfect in love; that the gift of His love may be shed abroad in us, and a drop of that

holy fire which He came to kindle may fall into our hearts, and purge them seven times for Himself.

2. But in this we see further the true pledge of our perseverance unto the end. Our whole salvation is begun, continued, and ended in His love. There is no other account to be given of it. How this is interwoven with the intricate mystery of our probation, we cannot now discern. Why should we? If we cannot believe this, where is our faith? To what fountain but His changeless love can we trace up the stream of mercy, which has borne us onward unto this day? His grace descended upon us when we were unconscious. It bare with us through long years of sinful ignorance; it restrained us from unknown ways of perdition, on which we were resolutely bent; it converted us when we were dead in security; it has upheld us through all dangers, declensions, and swervings, even to this day. If He had, at any hour, renounced His pledges with us, we must have perished. Here is the wonderful token of His patient love. He has preserved us not only from the power of sin, but from and against ourselves. Not only would sin have destroyed us, but we should have destroyed ourselves. He has watched over us as a guide and keeper. While we have been struggling to break from Him, His love has held us fast. He held us, pitying our ignorance, know-

ing our will, that as yet we had no true will of our own, but a slavish will; a will not free, because in bondage to our own sins. It is as if He had said, "Thou shalt not perish so. Thou shalt at least first see Me, and thyself in My light; and then perish if thou wilt,—if thou canst."

And that same love is the pledge of blessings yet to come. He that kept us from perishing when we were willing to perish, will surely keep us from perishing now that we are trembling to be saved. If He kept us while we loved the sweetness of sin, He will, beyond all doubt, hold us up now that we abhor it. It is from this love of sin that He will save us. When we are overcome with shame and fear because sin is still alluring to our eyes and pleasant to the taste, we may go to Him with this special confidence, that He will either make it to be hideous and bitter, or He will give us grace to withstand it to the end. If sin were hateful and tormenting, like sharp wounds or searing irons, where would be our danger? "No man ever yet hated his own flesh;" no man would be in peril of torturing himself into perdition. It is only because sin is sweet that it is perilous; and if it be sweet to us, it is because we are fallen and in a state of trial. He will not count us guilty because sin is alluring, but only because we consent to its allurement. To hate it in spite of its sweetness,

and to hate it for its sweetness, to be humbled with shame and sorrow at the consciousness that it has any power over us, and we any susceptibility of its attraction,—this is His work in us, and the pledge of our safety. Against this life-long peril our strength is His love. We may go to Him, and hold fast by Him, and none of these things shall set on us to hurt us. But perhaps we may say, "Yes, this I would do, if I were sure of myself; but here is my chief misgiving and my greatest danger,—the instability, changeableness, fickleness of myself: what can I say to this?" We may say, "I am not my own; I am His. I cannot help myself. If He should give me into my own keeping, I should perish outright. My intentions, my resolutions, my strength, my strivings, are faint, treacherous, soon wearied out, soon abandoned; but I can give myself over into His hands, and ask Him to keep me; for I cannot keep myself." This we may answer. And what more would we desire to say? What more can we say than this: "I am sinful, prone to fall, ready to slide at every step. Every kind of sin is stronger than I. Pride, vainglory, sloth, envy, anger, and the like, seize on me, and infuse themselves into my heart, even against my will. Sometimes, for a moment, I even consent to them; or, if I do not consent to them, I feel them with such a fulness and vividness as shews

my heart to be of their close kindred. And besides this, the wayward, moody, cold, estranged, loveless temper of my own mind is always making breaches between Him and me. I am always ready to perish, always perishing in my own hands. The root of death is in my own soul. It is against myself that I need a helper." Blessed hope and trust; we may give ourselves into His hands; we may go to Him, and trembling say, "I am afraid of myself, and dare not trust myself alone. Take me; for I am not my own. I am Thine, by my bond and pledge, by Thine own blood and by Thine own love, by Thy promise and by Thy betrothal. Take that Thine is, and keep it for me, lest I lose it utterly." What more can we say or need? "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."[1]

3. And lastly, in this there is our true and only stay in death. If we were saints, if we loved Him with all our soul and with all our strength, the most blessed day in life would be the last. To go and be with Him whom our soul loveth; to be for ever with Him, gazing upon His face of love, ourselves sinless and living by love alone,—this is heaven. Does it not shame and affright us to read how His true servants, not only the greater,

[1] 2 Tim. i. 12.

but even those who were among the least, have panted for that meeting; counting life a banishment, and the world desolate, and time laggard and slow? When the forerunners of death seemed to appear and greet them, when friends were full of eager sorrow, they rejoiced; evil tidings were to them glad tidings of good; for the end of their pilgrimage was come, and the vision of peace all but revealed. Why was this so with them? why did they not shrink and tremble? why did not their hearts beat with the fear of death?

Why, but because they could say, from the soul of their very being, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." "Perfect love casteth out fear. . . . He that feareth is not made perfect in love."[1] We are conscious of many sins, of a poor languid repentance, of a weak faith, doubting hope, and of a love rather in word and in tongue, in the reason and imagination, than in life and heart. A sense of our unfitness to call Him "My Beloved," or to stand before Him as His,—this shakes our very soul with fear. In such an hour where shall we find a stay? Where but in this, "He loves me; He loves me more than I love myself. On His side this is sure. On mine; I love Him. He knows how little, yet He knows I do; or at least, that to love Him is my desire. 'Lord, Thou

[1] 1 St. John iv. 18.

knowest that I love Thee.' 'Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?' He will not, and I dare not. Who, then, can? The powers of this world cannot reach into the world unseen. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the Rock on which I stand. Satan hath nothing in Him, nor through Him in me. It is sin that drives me closer to His Cross. My own will I have given into His hand; He will not leave me to myself.

Let us ask again, "Who, then, shall separate me? There is none that can. Though all powers of hell be against me for my unutterable guilt, all holy powers are on my side. God the Father loves me, and gave His Son for me; God the Son loves me, and gave Himself to me; God the Holy Ghost loves me, and has regenerated, prevented, restrained, converted me; the ever-blessed Trinity loves me, and desires my salvation; all heavenly powers and all holy angels love and rejoice over one penitent soul. The whole world unseen is benign and blessed, full of love to sinners, 'of whom I am chief.' I give myself into the hands of a boundless love: as an infinite misery, I cast myself upon an infinite mercy. This is my only stay, but it is all-sufficing." Let this be your answer.

But that we may be able to cast ourselves on this in death, we must make it our perpetual stay

in life. We must live in the grace of faith, hope, and love; or when our trial comes, we shall find our hearts fearful, doubtful, and shrinking. Let us more and more strive to see Him by faith, by the vision of our hearts, and to rest ourselves upon a full trust of His loving-kindness. Above all, let our labour and our prayer be, that we may love Him with a uniting and absorbing love. For what end did we come into this world, but that we might be united to Him eternally? What is the end for which we were redeemed, yea, by the foreknowledge of God created, but that we should be one with Him, as He is with the Father? The old creation was but a type of the new; the first espousals a shadow of that eternal marriage between the second Adam and the Church of the elect. Wonderful, and surpassing all thought and heart of man! Our spiritual sight is darkened before so great a splendour. What seems to us to be but a restoration is the ascent of a perfect work. The first is last, and the last first. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."[1] "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thun-

[1] Rev. iv. 11.

derings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God."[1]

[1] Rev. xix. 6-9.

SERMON XXIII.

THE VISION OF BEAUTY.

ISAIAH xxxiii. 17.

"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."

THESE words are so plain a prophecy of the beatific vision in the kingdom of the resurrection, that we may pass over the earthly and typical fulfilment they have already received; and go at once to the thought of what shall be hereafter. Who is this King but He on whose head St. John saw many crowns; on whose vesture and on whose thigh was written the name of power: "King of kings and Lord of lords?"

And "the land that is very far off;" what is it but that same of which Zechariah prophesied? "The Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His

land."[1] It can be no other than the heavenly country, for love of which God's elect have lived as strangers in the earth—a land far away, over a long path of many years, up weary mountains, and through deep broken ways, full of perils and of pitfalls—through sicknesses, and weariness, sorrows, and burdens, and the valley of the shadow of death; world-worn and foot-sore, they have been faring forth, one by one, since the world began, "going and weeping." And there is already gathered a multitude which no man can number, in the last passes which ascend into "the land that is very far off."

These words, then, plainly promise to every follower of Christ, if he shall persevere unto the end, that in the resurrection he shall see the Lord Jesus Christ in His beauty, and in the glory of His kingdom.

Let us now endeavour reverently to meditate on this wonderful promise of bliss: and may the light of His Spirit cleanse our hearts to understand so much as is good for us to know; and may His pity keep us back from vain and rash thoughts of so high a mystery.

What, then, is this beauty which shall be revealed to all who attain that world and the resurrection of the holy dead?

[1] Zech. ix. 16.

1. First, it would seem to be the beauty of His heavenly court. Both from the elder prophets and from the revelation given to St. John, we know that there is a sphere and circuit of which the centre is His throne. Whether this be called "the heaven of heavens,"[1] or "the third heaven,"[2] or "eternity,"[3] or "the high and holy place,"[4] or "the light which no man can approach unto,"[5] or "mount Zion,"[6] or "the new heavens and the new earth,"[7] is all one: all these titles of majesty point to one and the same place — a sphere of light and an orb of glory, of which prophets and apostles have had glances and reflections in ecstacy and rapture. "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him."[8] "There was under His feet as it were a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness."[9] "Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."[10] "I will take My rest," saith the Lord, "and consider in My dwelling-place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."[11]

[1] 1 Kings viii. 27. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 2. [3] Isaiah lvii. 15.
[4] Ibid. lvii. 15. [5] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [6] Heb. xii. 22.
[7] Rev. xxi. 1. [8] 1 Kings xxii. 19.
[9] Exod. xxiv. 10. [10] Isaiah vi. 2. [11] Ch. xviii. 4.

What was in this way revealed only through a veil of old, is now, by the rending of the veil, made manifest and open. "When the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones."[1] "Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold."[2] "Lo, in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain."[3] "Lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."[4] "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father's Name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne,

[1] St. Matt. xix. 28.
[2] Rev. iv. 2-4.
[3] Rev. v. 6.
[4] Ch. vii. 9.

and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth."[1] "Come hither; I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. . . . . And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."[2] "And he shewed me a pure river of water

[1] Rev. xiv. 1-3. [2] Ch. xxi. 9-14, 21-23.

of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month : and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse : but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it ; and His servants shall serve Him : and they shall *see His face ;* and His Name shall be in their foreheads."[1]

It seemed best, in trying to realise the outline and beauty of the heavenly court, to gather together as much as we could from the clear Scriptures of God. Here we cannot go astray. What the Holy Ghost has revealed of the home of saints, and the kingdom of the resurrection, is as certain and real as the visible creation of God. If here and there a word or two seem to refer these glorious visions to the Church on earth, and to prophecies of its unity and sanctity in time, let this one great law of revelation be remembered : The prophecies and parables of the earthly perfection of the Church are anticipations of its perfection in heaven. They are examples of the Divine prerogative of calling "things that are not, as though they were ;" and of giving to germs the honour

[1] Rev. xxii. 1-4.

of maturity; to weak beginnings the investiture and glory of their eternal perfection. The visible Church on earth is the sphere on which the Divine Spirit casts the image of its future glory. Therefore what we here read is a figure, a parable to exalt the Church on earth to the eye of faith; but it is also a revelation of the glory of the heavenly court, as it shall be hereafter seen by the pure in heart.

Let us, then, sum up, as we can, in our weak words and thoughts, the beauty which is here revealed. What is it but the glory of the blessed Three, and of the Word made flesh, sitting upon the throne of the Eternal? About Him and before Him are the companies of heaven, the hosts and hierarchies of the blessed, the nine orders of seraphic and angelic ministers, and the saintly multitude of God's new creation. Vision of beauty too intense even for thought! What must be the glory of one saint made perfect in the likeness of our Lord! what splendour of incorruption, where death and sin are not! What, then, shall be the beauty of that gathered host, of which the least would overwhelm our sight and soul with brightness? Armies of martyrs, companies of prophets, the majesty of patriarchs, the glory of apostles, each one in the full transfigured beauty of his own perfect spirit, and all revealing the warfare

of faith, the triumph of the Church, the power of the Cross, the election of God; these are the degrees and ascents leading upward to the throne of bliss.

2. But if such be the beauty of the King's court, what is the beauty of the King Himself? of His glorious Person as very God and very man? It is not for us to let loose our imagination without warrant, or at least without adumbrations of truth, without either tokens or shadows which reveal the forms from which they fall. And in holy Scripture we have some such intimations. Isaiah promises that we shall see "His beauty." Zechariah breaks out, even from afar off, and with a faint sight of His person dimly revealed: "How great is His beauty!"[1] Solomon in spirit and in the person of the Church says, He is "the chiefest among ten thousand. His mouth is most sweet, yea, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend."[2] And David, "Thou art fairer than the children of men."[3] Do not these things lead us on to understand why the child Jesus, as He "increased in wisdom and stature," increased also "in favour with God and man:"[4] why His very presence should have had a power to awaken love, as it also awakened won-

[1] Zech. ix. 17.
[2] Song of Sol. v. 10, 16.
[3] Ps. xlv. 2.
[4] St. Luke ii. 52.

der at "His understanding and answers;"[1] "at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."[2] Surely it was something more than interior beauty which drew to Him the sick, the sorrowing, the sinful, the helpless, with such mighty attraction. For the interior beauty of the spirit needs a spiritual eye. When Isaiah foretells that He should have "no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him;"[3] he seems plainly to speak of the worldly attraction and royal beauty for which the Jews were lusting, of that "observation" which was no forerunner or herald of the kingdom of God. It does not speak of that Presence before which the multitudes gave way, as the waters clave before the ark of God; and at the sight of which a host, armed to take Him, went backward and fell to the ground. It is surely no light thing that the Christian world, in its universal tradition of half a hundred generations, has piously and intimately believed that the second Adam, like the first, bore the outward signatures of God's perfect hand. It is not without some deep reason, dwelling in universal belief among those countless things which, if written, should have filled the whole world with Scrip-

[1] St. Luke ii. 47. [2] Ch. iv. 22.

[3] Isaiah liii. 2.

tures; or in the intuitions of the Spirit, or in the instincts of love, or in the self-evident harmonies of God's works; it is not, I say, without some or all of these reasons, that the world has believed that prophets, psalmists, and seers, knew what they spake, and spake what they beheld. It is a pardonable fault to take them in the letter of their words, and a harmless error to go astray with the belief of Christendom. We shall not be dangerously out of the way, if we lovingly and humbly believe that He who is the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person, did take unto Himself our manhood, as His revealed presence for ever, in its most perfect image and likeness; that where two natures were united, as both were perfect, so both were beautiful. I know not what he may be to whom such a thought is not blessed. We bear witness to it by the fond, blind way in which we invest all we love with beauty. Even the least comely and ill-favoured are lovely to those that love them. Our minds are full of lights and hues, with which we array the objects of our hearts. Let each do as he will. Only let us first love Him, and then weigh these thoughts. Till then, it is all too soon.

But be these things as they may, there is a beauty we know Him to possess in fulness, the beauty of perfect love. If the hardest-featured

of those who love us be lovely to our eyes; if the tenderness, sympathy, observance, and anxious affection, the soul of love which speaks from every line and from every motion of the eye and of the countenance of friends, draw our whole heart into them, as if we rather lived in them and by them than by a life in ourselves; if their coming and their presence, their speech and their silent gaze, be to us as beauty and delight; what shall be His presence and His countenance in the kingdom of the resurrection? What shall be the beauty of perfect meekness, perfect humility, perfect tenderness, perfect love, of perfect delight in our love, and perfect bliss in our sinless peace? "O wonder of love, O Friend all gentle, all pure, all wise, in whose presence to abide, under whose loving gaze to dwell, is heaven; shall we indeed see Thy beauty? Shall we see Thy form all majesty, and Thy countenance all love? Shall we look upon that of which we read in gospels, muse on before the altar, and picture in the heavens? Is it to us, is it to me, let each one ask, that Thou hast pledged Thy troth, that I shall see Thee with these very eyes wherewith I now see my own form and the face of this fleeting world? Shall I see the wounds, the five hallowed wounds, which Thou didst shew to Thy friends when the doors were shut, on the night of the resurrection; and the

very print of the nails, and the radiant circle of Thy crown of thorns? And shall I know and feel 'All this was for me,—consciously, and with clear intent, suffered upon earth for me?' O Love greater than love of man; Love of God, Love eternal, which created me, suffered for me, died for me, bare with me in my long, blind, stubborn rebellions, spared, shielded, restrained, converted me by holy inspirations, and the pleadings of tender upbraiding,—do I now see Thee face to face? Art Thou He that has ever blessed me behind the veil, and spread over me day and night Thy pierced hands, on whose palms my name was graven with the nails of crucifixion; out of whose depths has issued for me nothing but Thy precious blood and Thy cleansing grace all the days of my life? Now I behold Thy beauty, 'whom having not seen,' I desired to love; and in whom, though I saw Thee not as yet, I rejoiced, so far as my cold, loveless soul, conscious of sin, and shrinking from Thy pure presence, could rejoice and love. It was my blindness that hid from me Thy beauty. If I had loved, I should have perceived Thy love; and should have chosen Thy sweetness before all happiness on earth. But Thou hast saved me from my sins and from myself, and hast brought me to this 'land which is very far off;' far off from sorrow and crying,

from death and sin; and hast revealed to me Thy beauty in the vision of peace. Lord, it is enough: I desire no more: be this eternal, and it is enough for ever." Surely if we can venture to breathe such things, these will be among the thoughts of those who attain that world and the kingdom of the resurrection. But who can utter or conceive the beauty of the love of our ever-blessed Lord beaming from His Divine countenance, as the sun shineth in his strength? In that face will be revealed all the love of His holy Incarnation, of His life of sorrow, of His agony and passion, of His Cross and death. As if the soul and the accents of our manhood were not enough to express His love; as if promises of grace and works of mercy were inarticulate, He must speak to us in the language of agony, and print upon Himself for ever the characters of a "love which passeth knowledge." Therefore, in the midst of the throne was seen "a Lamb as if it had been slain." The wounds of His hands and feet, and of His pierced side, are eternal seals and countersigns of the love which has redeemed us for Himself.

And what can we more say? If this be His beauty as very man, what must be His beauty as very God? What must be that Divine, uncreated beauty, ancient but ever new, which, with

the Father and the Holy Ghost, is also in the Son? It is not a human or finite love which shall be seen in the face of the Word made flesh, but the mercy, compassion, tenderness, of the Eternal. God, who has revealed Himself to us in sundry ways and in divers manners; in the lights of heaven and the beauty of the earth, in life-giving seasons and fruitful suns, in prophecies and promises, in miracles and visions, by all the accents and in all the compass of human speech; as if all tongues had failed, and all language were too weak, has for our sake created a new speech and a new language for the utterance of His eternal love. He gave the Son of His love to be made man, to suffer, and to die, to redeem us from sin and death; to gather us, by His Spirit, about His throne, and to reveal to us, through human sympathy and the accents and the sorrows of our own nature, the perfection of His everlasting love. It is the love of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the beauty of the ever-blessed Three, the Holy One, that is revealed to us in the person of the King of Saints. But here let us rest and adore, lest we break through the fence, and sin against the majesty not yet unveiled.

We have come, then, to the end of all our thoughts and toils. For what else were we born, and for what end came we into the world, but to

behold the face of God? This is the end for which we were created; to this, as to its source and rest, our being tends; unto this all the mysteries and movements of His power and love, in nature and in the Spirit, invite and draw us. To love God, and to die,—this is the end of man: or read it in the light of heaven, to love God, and to dwell in God for ever,—this is our being and our bliss.

Now with two plain thoughts, full of soothing hope, we will make an end.

1. The first is, that the King whose beauty is the bliss of heaven is ever drawing and preparing us for His presence by all the mysteries of His Church. What is our Baptism but the real engrafting of our whole being, in body and soul, into this supernatural order, of which His heavenly court is the ripe and perfect fruit? What are all they who are gathered round Him now, and all who shall be gathered round Him when the whole mystical number is fulfilled, but poor sinners fallen and dead, born again by His free Spirit, and drawn by a succession of graces, each one linked within the other? There is a divine order in the scheme of our salvation, "descending from the first effect unto the last; that is, from the fruit, which is glory, to the root of this fair tree, which is the redemption of the Saviour.

For the Divine goodness bestows glory upon merits, merits upon love, love upon penitence, penitence upon obedience to vocation, obedience to vocation upon vocation, and vocation upon the redemption of the Saviour; on which rests the whole of that mystical ladder of the great Jacob, as well in heaven, forasmuch as it ends in the loving bosom of the everlasting Father, in which He receives and glorifies the elect; as also upon earth, forasmuch as it is planted on the bosom and in the pierced side of the Saviour, who died to redeem us on mount Calvary."[1] By this golden chain He draws us to Himself; working in us by the power of His grace, unfolding the interior capacities and faculties of our spiritual life; in some, from the gift of regeneration, onward through childhood, boyhood, youth, unto the ripeness of perfect life, by an ever advancing growth of purity and of fellowship with His veiled presence; in others, after waywardness and rebellion, by sharp scourges and barbed shafts, wounding the soul with appalling fears and pangs of conscious guilt, bowing them to the yoke of repentance, and through the grace of penance perfecting their conversion. By these two main paths of grace, but with infinite varieties of light and shadow, He leads us on,

[1] S. François de Sales, Traité de l'Amour de Dieu, liv. iii. c. 5.

enlarging our inward and spiritual sense of desire and sight.

But He not only works within us; He also proposes to our spiritual faculties an object of faith to prepare us for His manifested presence. He that is enthroned in "the land that is very far off" is the same that said, "Lo, I am with you alway." He is with us in the midst of His heavenly court. Even now it is "not far from any one of us." In the blessed Sacrament of the altar He reveals Himself in His beauty to the sight of the pure in heart. He is there sitting upon His exalted throne, and His train fills the temple. There is the Word made flesh, the Lamb that was slain, angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven. What is not there where He is, in Whom are all things? This is the great reality of truth, by which the regenerate live with Him in God. All the whole life of Christ's true servants upon earth is the melting of a twilight as it brightens into day. The world in which they live, indeed, is hidden, veiled, for a while, with shadows, sacraments, and symbols. But through all, the radiance of the Eternal Beauty shines upon them; and through all, their sight pierces, with a spiritual intuition, even to the land and kingdom of peace. But on earth there is no approach beyond the real presence of the Word made flesh.

The altar is His throne, already seen. After this there remains nothing but "the King in His beauty" seen face to face.

2. And lastly, the other truth for our consolation is this: that by a special and particular discipline, varied and measured for the necessities of every faithful soul, He is making us ready for the vision of His presence. The discipline of His Sacraments and mysteries is common to all members of His body: but the discipline of His chastising love is particular, and for each. By the gifts of His grace we are prepared for His chastisements, and by His chastisements we are prepared for fuller measures of His grace. If we resist His Spirit, or grieve Him by our rebellions, or hang back and sullenly refuse His leading, He has scourges of sharpness and of love to chasten us into faith. The experience of every one who has been brought under this loving discipline issues in one word: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray."[1] "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."[2] It is not only the careless and lukewarm, but the wakened and devout, who feel under chastisement as if, for the first time, they had received their sight. The whole order of the Church, and all its sacraments of grace, seem to unfold themselves into a new revelation of truth and meaning.

[1] Ps. cxix. 67. [2] St. John ix. 25.

Not that any thing without us is altered, but because we are changed within. Our baptism, on which we used to look as a font of pure water, we perceive to be "the river of the water of life," the grave of Christ, the mystical death, "the beginning of the new creation of God," the power of a holy resurrection. The Church rises before us on twelve foundations, builded four-square, the precincts of the holy city, and the avenue to the paradise of God; its order is linked with the hierarchies of heaven; its unity ascends into the heavenly court; its altars become one with that which stands upon Mount Sion, on which is the very Paschal Lamb. Even when seemingly most deprived of all outward channels of grace, these things are most deeply realised. In long exile from the sanctuary and the altar, when all seems most against them, then is His time of grace. Then He seems to reveal Himself with a directer light, and to shew that He is Lord also of the Church; that sacraments were ordained for man, not man for sacraments. He thus ministers to us by the interior priesthood of His mystical Body; and makes to overflow, by spiritual communion, the very souls who have in time past drawn but scanty graces from the visible sacrament of His love. And where is all this change but in ourselves, in the clearer

purging of our inward sight, and the awakening of keener desires for the vision of peace? Such is the work wrought in us by the inward discipline of pain and trial, of sorrow and of passion, whereby He makes His own know that they are His. Blessed tokens, though sharp and piercing; deep-cutting prints of the nails of the Cross; yet marking off those He chooses from the world, consecrating them, trembling and shrinking, to Himself. "Blessed are ye that weep" now, whether in contradiction, or bereavement, or sickness, or fear. Every visitation is a stage of advance in your walk of faith. Every chastisement is sent to open a new page in the great Book of Life—to shew you things within you which you knew not, and things which hereafter shall be your portion. He is cleansing the power of sight in you, that it may become intense and strong to bear His presence: and that power of sight is love; fervent and purifying love, consuming every sin, and purging out every stain. The more fervently you cleave to Him by love, the clearer shall be your vision of His beauty. Then welcome all He sends, if so be we may see Him at last, where there is no more sin, where truth has no shadow, where unity and sanctity have no dispute. Welcome sorrow, trial, fear, and the shadow of death, if only our sin be blotted out, and our

lot secure in the lowest room, in the light of His face, before the throne of His beauty, in our home and in our rest for ever.

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